

# *SPIRITUAL LIFE*

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FATHER WILLIAM OF THE INFANT JESUS, O.C.D., Editor

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# Editorial

"THIS is the greatest love a man can show, that he should lay down his life for his friends." No man ever showed this kind of love in his life so concretely and convincingly as our Lord: "For these sheep I lay down my life. . . . Nobody can rob me of it; I lay it down of my own accord."

No man ever loved like that before. No man ever will. But Christ said something once that sounds like even greater love than this. It does not contradict the other statement, for although laying down his life is the greatest love a *man* can show, it need not be the greatest love that God can show.

Divine love is boundless, reckless, and beyond the wildest dreams of man when Christ introduces us into the mystery of the Trinity, into the family-life of God. "I do not speak of you any more as my servants; a servant is one who does not understand what his master is about, whereas I have made known to you all that my Father has told me; and so I have called you my friends."

Friendship is based on love. And this is the most amazing and magnificent expression of love: that God should reveal and manifest Himself to us, share with us His eternal and infinite knowledge of Himself! And that's what makes us His friends. One can almost picture our Lord like a little boy, running with exquisite, carefree abandon from friend to friend telling all the secrets of the Godhead. No greater love than that!

Now we know something of the inner life of God. We know that God lives an infinite life of knowledge and love. We know that God, knowing Himself with infinite knowledge, thinking of Himself with infinite power, generates an idea of Himself. This idea, the Word that God generates, is necessarily the total, perfect, and adequate expression of Himself — infinite, eternal, living, a person, equal in



every respect to Him who generates it. And this Word is His Son, of the same nature as the Father, God as He is God.

The Father loves the Son, whom He engenders. The Son loves the Father, who engenders Him. They contemplate each other, love each other, love the glory of the Godhead, which is their own; and just as the act of knowing produces a (mental) Word within the divine nature, this act of loving produces a state of lovingness within the divine nature. Father and Son unite in a love so powerful, strong, and perfect that it forms between them a living bond. This love of infinite altruism does not speak; does not cry; does not even sing; it expresses itself as we do in some ineffable moments by that which indicates that we have given everything; namely, a sigh, or a breath – and that is why the Third Person of the Holy Trinity is called the Holy Spirit.

That we should get such a glimpse into the inner life of God is remarkable. But even more remarkable is the fact that we can actually share that divine life. The whole purpose of the Incarnation was to begin on earth the kind of life God lives eternally in heaven. This happened when God became man and the eternal canticle of love which the Word sang from all eternity in the bosom of God now emanated with the same richness and worth from the human heart of Christ, who marches forever before the generations of men with a song of love and praise in His heart and a single word on His lips: namely, Eternal Father.

Now there is one Man in the world in whom the created life, derived from his mother, is completely and perfectly attuned to the divine life begotten of God. There is one Man magnificently and gloriously alive with the Trinitarian life of God. He is the God-Man, Christ, whose Mystical Body prolongs the Incarnation.

We can share this life of Christ. If we do, we become, like Christ, sons of God; we become part of the family life of God. But to do that we have got, in a way, to get into Christ. If we want to get warm we've got to get into something with heat in it; if we want to get wet, we've got to get into something with water in it. And so, if we want the divine life, we've got to get into the one, unique thing in the world that has it – the Mystical Body of Christ. We do that when we receive the sacrament of Baptism, which incorporates

us into the Church, Christ's Mystical Body. But it's an inchoate kind of life; more like seeds than anything else; or a capacity. Those seeds have got to grow. That capacity must be filled.

The life of the Trinity must unfold in the soul of every Christian. God the Father must see and know and express His Word in us; the Son must praise and glorify the Father; the Holy Spirit must rise in us out of this reciprocal love.

That is why in all the saints we find a special quality called *Christian inwardness*.

St. Augustine has a celebrated passage about this inwardness: "Too late did I love Thee, O Fairness, so ancient, and yet so new! Too late did I love Thee! For behold, Thou wert within, and I without, and there did I seek Thee. I, unlovely, rushed heedlessly among the things of beauty Thou madest. Thou wert with me, but I was not with Thee. Those things kept me far from Thee, which, unless they were in Thee, were not."

St. John of the Cross writes in the same vein: "Come thou soul, most beautiful of all creatures, that so greatly desirest to know the place where thy Beloved is, in order to seek Him and be united with Him; now thou art told that thou thyself art the lodging wherein He dwells, and the closet and hiding place where He is hidden. Thus it is a matter of great contentment and joy for thee to see that all thy good and thy hope are so near thee as to be in thee, or, to speak more exactly, so near that thou canst be without them. Behold, says the Spouse, the kingdom of God is within you. And His servant the Apostle St. Paul says: Ye are the temple of God."

But nowhere is the doctrine of the indwelling of the Trinity lived and taught so eloquently as in the life and writings of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, the Carmelite of Dijon. We dedicate this issue to her on her fiftieth anniversary.

FATHER WILLIAM OF THE INFANT JESUS, O.C.D.



*The following is a descriptive summary of spiritual growth as delineated in the works of St. John of the Cross. The author is the Archbishop of Bologna, the man the whole world knows because of his constructive liturgical program, his prodigious activity, his unflagging attacks on Communism. One can easily discern in this article the source of his invincible fertility. (Cf. Rivista Di Vita Spirituale, Anno lx, No. 4, 1955.)*

## Christian Inwardness

Giacomo Cardinal Lercaro, Archbishop of Bologna

**"O Most Blessed Light, Fill the Hearts of Thy Faithful"**

IN THE beautiful sequence for the Pentecost Mass, the liturgy entreats the Holy Spirit to fill the depths of our heart. The Holy Spirit present in us, the sweet Guest of our souls, is the foundation, the reason, and the source of our interior life. Perhaps we might say that for the men of our age the interior life is nothing else than a nostalgia, because we have allowed ourselves to become engulfed by externals. There is a constant succession of external impressions and impulses which we experience, and unfortunately we have become accustomed to yield to them without a struggle. It might be said that we do not truly live, but have already lived. For many, life has become a passive thing. It is completely dominated by the external, as the leaves in autumn are at the mercy of the wind. There is no longer a profound internal law, not even on the human and rational level which governs life; living today is fashioned, directed, and ruled by public opinion, by mass psychology, by the "everybody does it" philosophy. People today very often are under the influence of an almost unconscious, unconfessed, a frightening inferiority complex, which compels them to succumb to the thoughts, opinions, and usages of the group. By living such a life governed by external impulses, man seeks to escape from himself. Too often we are afraid to look into our own hearts, to scrutinize our own

souls. We do not want to discover ourselves. Diversion, in the etymological meaning of the word, means to go out of oneself; it has become the obsession of present-day life.

The interior life, however, has remained in us almost as a haunting memory. We must find ourselves again, but before all else we must find Another who is in us but far above us. The interior life on the purely natural plane is truly a beautiful thing: man finds himself; he contemplates and understands ever more deeply an interior law or directive which guides him and illumines all his steps. But the interior life of the Christian is a thousand times more beautiful and noble because it is nothing else than attentiveness to and co-operation with the divine Guest who dwells within his soul.

The foundation of the whole interior life of the Christian is found in this wondrous truth: God inhabits his soul. This divine Guest of the soul is not inert like a statue in its niche; He is most active. The soul therefore dare not forget Him or neglect Him. It must follow His inspirations and directives. It must receive its light from Him, rejoice in His presence, move under His direction. All its conduct, its interior and exterior attitudes, must conform to Him. This is the interior life of the Christian. It is beautiful, peaceful, even mild, but it has power which radiates like the sun.

When one meets a person of a deep interior life, he can hardly avoid being fascinated. Such a person exercises gentle and compelling influence for good. His words have a power that other words have not. He may be a person who, according to human standards is ignorant, uncultured; but, when he speaks, his words are so persuasive that they penetrate to the depths of the spirit. There comes to mind the text from St. Paul: "It is a two-edged sword, penetrating to the depths of the soul." The very look of such a person is so simple, so pure, so mysteriously profound that at times a glance into that serene eye is sufficient to move another. One looks into that serene eye, and something new and indefinite happens in his own soul; truths long since pushed aside and forgotten are brought to mind.

This is the interior life of the Christian: the presence of the Holy Spirit in the soul and the manifestation of that Spirit to the world by word and action.



### *The Experience of Prayer*

This interior life of the Christian has a hidden source. This loving attention to and docile co-operation with the divine Guest has its own force, a necessary support proper to itself; it has its hour of meeting, its special time of intimacy with the divine Guest: we are of course referring to prayer. The Holy Spirit is the teacher of prayer. He alone is the One who can guide the soul in prayer. We might even say that it is He who prays within us.

"He prays with unutterable groanings," says St. Paul. He does this within us, through us. It is His prayer on our lips and in the depths of our heart: *Abba*, Father. He is the divine Source from which all prayer flows. Prayer is the daily meeting of the soul with the Holy Spirit, who guides those who are docile along the wondrous paths of divine intimacy. It may happen that a person who unfortunately has never experienced the richness and beauty of prayer may regard it as something for untalented, simple-minded people; it would be nothing more than a mechanical repetition of formulas. The ineffable grandure of prayer escapes such a person. Those who have any experience, however slight, in this spiritual world, the world of prayer under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, know from their own experience that "all the wealth of the world is as a grain of sand in comparison to it." Nothing can take the place of the joys, subtle consolations, the peace and serenity which prayer brings to the soul. In prayer the Holy Spirit guides the soul along a wondrous pathway, which St. John of the Cross, the mystical doctor of prayer, calls the "ascent of Mount Carmel."

### *Perseverance Brings Reward*

At times the Holy Spirit is not only a Guide; He is like an eagle that plunges upon the soul, seizes it in its inmost depths, and bears it aloft to unimaginable heights. This is the mystery of the divine liberty. God is the master of His own actions; no person or law dictates to Him. Happy is the soul that is borne to the heights of contemplation by the Holy Spirit. Such a thing may come to the soul suddenly, without any long training beforehand, without, as it were, any apprenticeship. However, the Holy Spirit does not usually

work in this manner. Rather, He supports the earnest and generous efforts of the soul, which ascends, step by step, the steep mountain of Carmel in order to attain at last, if God so wills it, the state of contemplation. The usual road is perhaps less brilliant than the first and even though it will involve bitterness and fatigue, it has its own divine beauty. Here we are speaking of the way of meditation. Meditation is a work of the spirit, of the intellect and the will; it centers itself on the word of God. By meditation the soul seeks to penetrate divine mysteries by means of the Gospel, the spiritual writings of the Fathers of the Church, and the liturgy. The spirit concentrates on the word of God, with its various powers. With its memory, it brings to mind various different incidents from the Gospel or the lives of the saints. Then with the intellect, it seeks to draw nourishment for the spiritual life by humble and profound reflection. When the soul has penetrated more deeply the word of God, has tasted its sweetness, the will is inflamed with sentiments of love for Christ, with sorrow for sin, with humiliation because of its own misery, with confidence in the goodness of God. This is the way the Holy Spirit guides beginners in the spiritual life, those who are weak at present but aspire to the splendors of contemplation. This way has its own particular temptations and perplexities, but there must be no fainting on the road. Sometimes the very monotony of meditation creates a temptation to abandon the fight. The soul must have courage and constancy, and go on in a spirit of faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps at some unexpected moment He will open the door to a higher way in the spiritual life. Very likely also before opening that door He will allow the soul to undergo a severe trial, one that St. John of the Cross has called a "dark night." For a time all may be bright. The soul derives strength and power from its daily meditation. It rejoices in the light given it by the Lord. Its heart burns with love of God and generous impulses which render a life of virtue relatively easy. Then comes a night which engulfs the soul and seems to shut out the light and extinguish the fire of love. A painful aridity settles upon the spirit. The soul feels alone, abandoned by God, insensible to that which before awakened sentiments of generosity; the spiritual exercises which before nourished the life of love are now



disgusting. What bitterness, what desolation in this dark night!

But the soul must not be discouraged. It must not believe that the divine Guest, who has been a faithful Guide, has withdrawn. He is still near. He is like a mother, watching anxiously while her child takes his first steps alone, ready to support him should there be any danger of falling. The Holy Spirit still hovers near, filled with divine compassion and love, as He watches the soul move ahead in the midst of its bitterness and desolation. If the soul resists the temptation to give up prayer, if it is faithful to God, if it perseveres in the life of love through the darkness of this night, then the Holy Spirit introduces it to a new and wondrous type of prayer which it has never experienced before.

### *The Realm of Affective Prayer*

There is no longer any need to reflect and meditate on the word of God, on the Gospel, on the lives of the saints, on the liturgy. One thought, one phrase from the Gospel, one text from the liturgy will be sufficient to move the heart, to awaken the will with sentiments of generosity. The soul has now entered the realm of affective prayer. Long reflections are no longer necessary. The soul lives in an atmosphere of faith. The light of faith permeates it, and the soul sees all things, judges all things by that light. In the light of faith, all things are seen in their true perspective, all things move the heart, all things inflame the will with love. Prayer now becomes an uplifting of the heart; it is love, it is sorrow, it is joy, it is repentance, it is profound humility before the greatness of God and at the same time unbounded trust and complete abandonment to our Father in heaven.

Now the time of prayer passes most swiftly. What a beautiful thing it is to converse with Christ! We might say that now the soul does not find time to say all those things that its heart suggests. Affections and sentiments spring forth from the depths of the soul like the first flowers of spring; they inspire the heart to give itself completely to God. Prayer is now an enchantment; it is too brief. St. Francis de Sales advises: "Do not prolong your prayer beyond due time without the advice of a spiritual director." There may come a strong temptation now to lengthen the time of prayer.

This is the temptation that St. Peter experienced on Mount Tabor: "Lord, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." He did not know what he was saying, comments the Evangelist. So sweet is this time which the soul passes in conversation with God that it is strongly tempted to forget everything else and remain in prayer.

### *A Time for Perseverance*

It might now be asked: Has the divine Guide completed His work? The answer is no. Only the first part of the road has been traveled. The heights to which the soul aspires are still far off. More than likely the soul will have to pass through another dark night. There comes a day when the beauty and joy of prayer vanishes like smoke. The soul may become terrified at the vision of a spiritual wasteland opening before it. The heart seems to become hardened; generous impulses dry up; sentiments of love and devotion disappear. Once again prayer becomes most difficult, almost impossible. The soul seems to be completely given over to temptations, distractions, and dissipation. What extreme bitterness! The night can even become more painful than this. Very often external trials are the lot of such a soul; circumstances work together to weigh down the afflicted spirit which can find no rest. God hides His Presence, and seems to have taken leave of the soul. It was so easy to speak to Him before. The soul felt His nearness, His goodness, His paternal love. Prayer surged spontaneously from the heart without effort or exertion.

And now the soul exclaims, "Where are You, my God? Where do You hide Yourself, that I cannot find You? I have lost You." The soul becomes frightened. Perhaps, it thinks, this is an omen of eternal damnation.

The soul must once again go on in a spirit of faith; it must have great confidence in God. Although the night is dark, it precedes a brilliant and luminous day. The soul must abandon itself completely with unshakable confidence into the hands of the Holy Spirit. It must not seek the consolations of prayer. Previously the soul was tempted to prolong prayer simply because of the joy it experienced. It must break its attachment to the sweetness of prayer, and seek



God alone. Outside of God, it must desire nothing: "*nada, nada*," says St. John of the Cross.

The soul has been placed in this purifying fire of the dark night in order that it may overcome the last vestiges of self-love. It must not love even the most noble delights of prayer, but must learn to love God alone, God for Himself, and not for the consolations He may give.

### *The Prayer of Simplicity*

If the soul remains faithful to God throughout the obscurity of the dark night, the aridity finally comes to an end. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the soul reaches the highest degree of prayer possible without an extraordinary grace. In His ordinary providence, God offers this wonderful gift to all souls of good will. It is called prayer of simple regard, or prayer of simplicity, or, according to the Carmelite school, "active contemplation." The soul arrives at that most happy moment when it no longer needs to say many things to God. It is sufficient now to simply gaze upon Him and to love Him. Formerly many and varied sentiments and affections welled up within its heart, and sought expression in particular and distinct acts. Now there is only one serene and limpid sentiment; it is love, and it expresses itself no longer in varied acts, but in one general gaze upon God. This serene gaze upon the Divinity is everything to the soul; it is love, joy, sorrow for sin, humility; it is unbounded confidence, praise, and admiration. This gaze is most simple, but synthesizes within itself all that can be said. With one word alone, it tells God all, and that word is *love*. The enchantment of this most simple encounter with God, of this peaceful gaze upon Him, of this wonderful exchange of love, brings intense happiness to the soul.

Those who have written of this prayer describe it as something so productive of joy and rapture that we might very well consider it a foretaste of heaven, because in heaven there will be no reasoning, no multiplicity of affective acts, but only serene contemplation and fruition of divine love. We might very well think that in this active contemplation, a soul attains the highest type of prayer possible in this life. Could there be any prayer superior to this? The saints tell us that there is something even beyond the prayer of simplicity.

### *Mystical Contemplation*

The history of sanctity, the history of prayer, the history which the Holy Spirit Himself has written in the lives of the saints: all bear witness to the fact that there is an even higher type of prayer. Some masters of the spiritual life and of mystical theology have called these higher graces of prayer extraordinary. They call them extraordinary because the Holy Spirit gives to whomsoever He wills and when He wills.

There are others who hold that such graces pertain to the ordinary development of the life of grace. All the baptized, if they are in the state of grace, partake in the divine nature. They are called to live the divine life in all its fullness, even to the heights of mystical contemplation. Therefore, all are called to the mystical life. The majority of Christians do not achieve mystical contemplation, not because God fails them, but rather because they either do not cooperate with divine grace or else are hampered by some external circumstance. However this may be, it is certain that there is a higher stage in the way of prayer than that of active contemplation. It is called passive contemplation. Here the Holy Spirit Himself takes all the initiative and the soul abandons itself to Him.

### *Passive Contemplation*

The mystics have discerned various grades of passive contemplation, which we will not now take the time to examine. It will be sufficient merely to mention this last stage of the way of prayer, where the soul experiences the mystery of grace, where a new and superior light illumines it, where a most intimate contact with God inflames it with love. The soul is immersed in a sea of joy, which becomes torment, but a torment which only increases the joy.

St. John of the Cross, together with St. Therese and other saints, has written of the wonders of this mystical contemplation. In *The Living Flame of Love* he places this cry on the lips of the soul: "Break the web of this sweet encounter." There is now only a veil which separates it from the vision of God. It is the veil of faith. Not yet does the soul enjoy the beatific vision. It yearns that this



tenuous veil be withdrawn. Then there will be an eternal meeting with God, eternal joy in the possession of the highest good.

"The soul sighs having been wounded with love," says St. John of the Cross. "It sighs not because it is wounded — the more deep the wound, the more intense the joy — but because that wound does not cause it to die."

This is the contemplation of the summit of Carmel. When the soul has finally reached this highest earthly contact with God, which is a foretaste of heaven, the encounter does not endure for an hour or two; it is constant. Then the soul, even in the midst of the most absorbing occupations, remains always united with God. This constant attention which never ceases, this union which cannot be dissolved, even though the soul is busy about many things, presents an insoluble psychological problem. The soul does not renounce contact with other men; it continues to work with them, to speak with them; it attends to all the practical necessities of life. At the same time the most loving Guest is constantly present to it; He fills the depths of the soul.

The Holy Spirit is truly a wonderful Teacher, the only Teacher: "Fill the hearts of Thy faithful." When we sing these words to the Holy Spirit in the sequence for the feast of Pentecost, let us remember that the richness of His divine gifts is beyond comparison. Let us remember that He alone is our consolation and strength; He is the warmth of divine charity and the fire of love; He calms the violence of our passions and enables us to love our neighbor with a truly supernatural charity. Let us remember that He is wisdom, and knowledge, and understanding, and fortitude, and counsel. Above all, let us remember that He is piety, the Teacher of prayer, the divine Guest of the soul, who desires to lead us to the heights of contemplation (to the supreme encounter with God in this life). Therefore, we will abandon ourselves to Him that He may be our Guide and Protector along the beautiful pathway of prayer, which is nothing else than the gateway to Paradise.

*Elizabeth of the Trinity is the shining example of Christian Inwardness, of a person drawn and captivated by the core of reality: the mystery of the Trinity. Father Denis, author of this brilliant condensation of her life and doctrine, is rector of the Discalced Carmelite Minor Seminary, Peterboro, New Hampshire.*

## A Sketch of the Life of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity

*Father Denis of the Holy Family, O.C.D.*

WHO is Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity? Why dedicate an entire issue of SPIRITUAL LIFE to a Carmelite nun who died fifty years ago at the age of twenty-six? Why is it that Catholic theologians, men of the stature of the Dominicans Marie-Michel Philipon and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, or the Benedictine monk Dom Eugene Vandeur, or the German priest Father Hans Urs von Balthasar, dedicate numerous doctrinal studies to the statement of her message and its explanation?

Questions like these must have occurred to most of our readers by this time, for Elizabeth of the Trinity is still an unknown quantity to most of the English-speaking world. Yet, without anticipating the judgment of the Church as to her sanctity, we can assert on good theological grounds that she belongs in the category of men and women like St. Paul the Apostle, whom she interprets, St. John of the Cross, her father and teacher, and St. Therese of the Child Jesus, whose teaching she complements. As the cause for her canonization proceeds in Rome, we can assert that in her we have another case of the Father's revelation of things to His little ones which are hidden from the wise and prudent of this world. Yet these things mean the difference between a healthy, happy spiritual life and mental languor, or even sickness unto death.



Before examining her life in outline, however, let us beware of the temptation of casting a saint or servant of God away because she does not fit into our way of reasoning. We who find so much that is boring and unsatisfying in our spiritual lives in this century need the message of one of our century, assuring us that she "found heaven on earth, since heaven is God, and God is in my soul."

### *Elizabeth Catez*

France was the nation which produced Elizabeth Catez, and not the France of the Curé of Ars with its Catholic Revival, nor the France of Napoleon III and the new Empire, but that of the Third Republic, the Dreyfus Case, and the anticlerical laws. Her father was one of those stern French soldiers, proud of his own warrior heritage; her mother a very down-to-earth person to whom Elizabeth tried to teach the secret of her interior life — without too much success. She had a sister, Marguerite, a gentle and retiring girl in contrast to Elizabeth who was sanguine and given to outbursts of temper in her earlier years. She has a niece who is now a member of the same Carmel of Dijon. All about her — her style of expression, her sensitive nature, her letters and poems, even her preoccupation with certain "intimate" friends speaks to us of that French Catholic middle class from which the Little Flower also sprang.

Born at Bourges in 1880 on July 18, Elizabeth Catez was a normal child in every way. Though she lost her father at an early age, there was nothing morbid or sanctimonious about her childhood, nothing of the extraordinary even in the workings of grace within her soul. Grace began its work in her, as in all Christian babies, from the moment of her baptism. Her first confession, soon after she had reached the age of reason, "caused a complete awakening with respect to the things of God." Then followed her struggle against her innate irascibility and sensitivity. The priest who prepared her for her First Communion told a close friend of her mother: "With her temperament, Elizabeth Catez will be either a saint or a demon." Christ came to her in her First Communion at the age of fourteen to inspire her to choose sanctity. She did.

In one of her poems written "On the Anniversary of my First Communion," April 19, 1898, she speaks of "the Master taking pos-

session of her heart so completely that thenceforth her one desire was to give her life to Him." This beckoning call of Christ blossomed in the calm self-command which soon began to characterize her. The thought of the Carmel of Dijon, which she was able to see from the balcony of her home there, came early to her mind, and once again she understood. Soon after her First Communion, at the age of fourteen, God prompted her to vow herself to Him in virginity during her thanksgiving after Holy Communion.

All this is the normal work of grace in the soul of a normal French girl. And lest we think the poems written between the ages of fourteen and nineteen strange, let us hasten to add that they were not so in the France of Elizabeth Catez. Nor were her evening parties in which she dressed simply but irreproachably or the offers of marriage which she refused. After failing to gain her mother's permission to enter Carmel at seventeen, Elizabeth had busied herself in her parish, singing in the choir and playing (she was an accomplished pianist), teaching catechism to a group of children who were older and perhaps slower than the regular class of first communicants, and helping in a club for the "tough youngsters" who worked in the tobacco industry at Dijon. She had a gift for charming the children. When she took them to the church for May devotions, they used to make her stay as near the back door as possible, so that they could drag her off as soon as the tabernacle closed at the end of Benediction for a walk filled with interesting stories.

A friend tells us that "Elizabeth Catez always fitted into every mood." She appreciated the tarts made by the family's cook, Francine, and the heavy dinners typical of the south of France, which, they say, fill a person to the bursting point for three days. On summer vacations when the family visited Switzerland, the Vosges and the Pyrenees Mountains, as well as a considerable portion of France, she enjoyed herself with relatives, friends, and girls of her own age. While staying at Tarbes in 1898 she wrote to a friend: "All the music shops in Tarbes could not keep us supplied with pieces to play at sight."

However, the Paris Exhibition of 1900, noisy and crowded, had little appeal. It drew from her sister Marguerite the remark that she was like someone just back from the Congo. For she had begun



that asceticism of solitude and silence which would develop the qualities of soul that were to prepare the way for the creative action of grace. The maturity revealed in the questionnaire she filled out soon after entering Carmel did not come at once. It was the fruit of many years of "going against" her temperament. Once she tried to fast without her mother's knowledge. The good woman discovered the fact and gave her daughter a sound scolding. Soon after, she read St. Teresa of Avila's *Way of Perfection*, and she could not help but recognize the signs of the workings of God in her soul, and His presence there. Yet she mentions at the same time "how hard and trying ordinary prayer seems! How painfully one must toil to unite all one's powers! How much it costs and how difficult it seems!"

When Elizabeth was nineteen, she was allowed to resume her visits to Carmel, after an absence of eight years at her mother's insistence. A year later, 1900, when she was visiting the Carmel, she was introduced to a Dominican, Father Gonsalve Valee, who gave the decisive orientation to Elizabeth's prayer life. When she asked the old priest hesitantly about the presence of God which she was beginning to feel within her soul, he answered: "But most certainly, my child; the Father is there, the Son is there, and the Holy Spirit is there." And he continued speaking of how the soul is "the temple of God" through the grace of Baptism, and how the Most Blessed Trinity is present within, working out our sanctification as long as we are in the state of grace and place no obstacle to His action. But as the priest talked on, Elizabeth admitted later, "I was longing for him to be silent." She was one of those rare souls, raised up by God, who need only an indication, a single ray of light, to send them flying on the path of their eternal vocation.

### *Sister Elizabeth, Carmelite*

A year later, when she was shown into her Carmelite cell in August of 1901 to begin her six months' postulancy, Elizabeth was heard to whisper: "The Trinity is there!" The questionnaire filled out a week later reveals a precision of mind and a maturity of soul which is surprising in a twenty-one-year-old.

Q. What is your ideal of sanctity? A. To live by love.

Q. What is the quickest way to reach it? A. To become very small, to give oneself wholly and irrevocably.

Q. Who is your favorite saint? A. The Beloved Disciple, who rested on the heart of his Master.

Q. What point of the Rule do you like best? A. Silence.

Q. What is the dominant trait in your character? A. Sensitivity.

Q. What is your favorite virtue? A. Purity.

Q. What fault of character do you dislike most? A. Egoism in general.

Q. Give a definition of prayer. A. The union of her who is not with Him who is.

Q. What is your favorite book? A. *The Soul of Christ*. In it I learn all the secrets of the Father who is in heaven.

Q. Have you a great longing for heaven? A. I sometimes feel homesick for heaven, but, except for the vision, I possess it in the depths of my soul.

Q. What is your motto? A. "God in me and I in Him."

In intention at least, if not yet in execution, Sister Elizabeth already had the salient characteristics of soul which were to become evident in her subsequent life, and found synthesis in her great "Prayer to the Trinity," composed three years later on November 21, 1904. She came to Carmel knowing just what she wanted: interior recollection. This is exactly what she found, after paying the price of her asceticism of silence.

Her silence was profound, not a thing of the lips alone, but also a silence of the mind and heart, crystallized in her expression: "Listening" to God within. It is interesting for us who are bored with the inanities of television and the news to note that the biggest and best news of all, the presence of God within us, carries none of the ennui that is such an unhealthy part of modern experience. Rather than boring, this mystery became more and more entrancing, more and more alluring to the young postulant. She received the Carmelite habit and the white veil on December 8, 1901.

Let us not, however, be surprised to find her writing to a friend: "I was so happy when you told me I was the Sister you liked best. I love to reread those lines." (The saints are so very human. It is what enables them to become the glory of our humanity.) It is

true that she liked attention a bit too much, but at the same time she had the courage to write soon after to the same friend: "Being together (in chapel) is even better than our nice talks." She knew that the Lord's work was to be wrought in silence.

### *Listening to the Word of God*

Do we not forget Christ's injunction in the Gospel to "pray in secret," having shut the door of our souls, so that our Father who sees in secret may hear us (cf. Mt. 5:1)? Or that "for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account on the day of judgment" (Mt. 12:36)? Sister Elizabeth did not. It is true that useless words are not seriously wrong, but they are profitless for salvation. To pare them to a minimum is an asceticism which harms neither health nor happiness, and in the case of our neighbor, he might have reason for great joy if we did not flood him with a continual bombardment of words. Moreover, this is a mortification which goes straight to the roots of the wounds of original sin. It cleanses the interior of the cup so that God's grace may be free to work.

It is not a negative thing; it means "listening" to the Word of God, who "enlightens the recollected soul according to its recollection in faith," says St. John of the Cross. For Sister Elizabeth, silence meant "to keep our whole being in unity . . . to collect all our powers, to occupy them in the single labor of love, to have the 'simple eye' which allows the light of God to illumine us."

We have here the recognition of a fundamental principle: that if we are seeking God, He is seeking us all the more, and our striving for His presence and light and strength is a co-operation. Gradually His action, always pre-eminent, takes over in the faculties of the soul and the influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit makes the soul habitually move. This is the result of "listening." Sister Elizabeth heard well. She heard the words of the Eternal Word, saying: "If any man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father and I will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him" (Jn. 14:23).

However, here below the light shines in the darkness, and faith alone can comprehend it. Mother Germaine of Jesus, Elizabeth's



prioress all through her five years in Carmel, added another fundamental orientation to the life of the young religious when she said: "Go to God by faith." Though faith means darkness and obscurity, Sister Elizabeth was not afraid of it. She walked in faith and waited in patience, gradually immolating her desires for attention until she arrived at real, disinterested charity.

Even before her religious life, Elizabeth had gone out of her way to be of service to her pastor and a source of gaiety to her family and friends. Her parish priest, also her confessor for a long time, assures us that she offered her life for priests. This apostolate of the Carmelite Reform stems from the Mother of Carmel, St. Teresa of Avila. Elizabeth gave early evidence of it. A year after her entrance she realized "the fusion between the soul of the priest and that of the Carmelite." To a young seminarian, a friend of her family, who came to the monastery to ask her prayers, she gave a beautiful statement of the priestly ideal: "to reproduce Christ unceasingly in the sight of His Father." She asked priests to pray for her in return for her prayers for them, especially during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Her faith in the priesthood was as real as her faith in Jesus Christ. "The priest is another Christ, working for the glory of the Father." It was only a step from the "priest is another Christ" to the "Christian is another Christ." She recognized her vocation (and ours) "to be to Christ another humanity in which He renews His mystery."

In her visits to the parlor, and in her letters, as in all contacts with her mother, her sister, her friends, and all who came near her (she was the turn Sister for some time) she silently but sweetly carried on her apostolate of the Divine Indwelling. She knew this truth was the secret of happiness, and like a true daughter, sister, and friend, she wanted her mother, her sister, and her friends to find their hearts' happiness.

On November 21, 1904, the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin, the entire community renewed their religious profession. While Sister Elizabeth was pronouncing the formula of her vows, she felt an irresistible movement of grace raise her up to the Holy Trinity. As soon as she returned to her cell, she took up her pen and, on a common sheet of paper from a notebook, without

hesitation or correction, she wrote her beautiful prayer to "Her Three." She had truly become "Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity."

### "The Praise of Glory"

Like the Little Flower, after her "Act of Oblation to the Merciful Love of God," Sister Elizabeth ran with giant steps after composing her prayer to the Trinity. Every petition, every line found its proper expression in her personality. God answered her prayer with infinite largess. He visited her through suffering, the suffering that is necessary for the completion of the finishing touches of the soul's transformation in Christ.

On "free days" in Carmel, the Sisters are permitted to visit one another in their cells. Sister Elizabeth did so one such day during the summer of 1905, and in the course of their conversation, the elder nun said to Elizabeth: "I have found a splendid passage in St. Paul: 'God has created us for the praise of His glory.'" After Sister Elizabeth returned to her cell, she took up the Epistles of St. Paul in their Latin text to find the words that had impressed her so. Not being able to do so, she returned to the cell of the other Sister and said: "I cannot find the place. Will you be kind enough to show it to me again?" The passage was found, wherein St. Paul says that we have been "predestined according to the purpose of him who works according to the counsel of his will, to contribute to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:11). Latinists will smile at the little nun, searching so diligently for the passage from St. Paul, taking it bodily out of the text, and calling herself thenceforth *Laudem Glorise*, in the accusative case. But her spiritual sense was unerring. Alluding to the words of the Apocalypse, in which Christ promises to give "a new name . . . which no one knows except him who receives it" (2:17) to him who overcomes, she wrote to her sister Marguerite a last letter in the summer of 1906, signing it *Laudem Glorise*, and adding a P.S.: "This will be my name in heaven."

Her sense was unerring. Heaven was not far away, and her mission, like the Little Flower's, was to begin there soon. In the middle of Lent of 1906, the symptoms of serious stomach trouble became obvious. On Palm Sunday her condition was aggravated by a sudden

faint, and the priest was summoned to give her the Last Sacraments. He said, "I have seen many sick persons, but I never saw a sight like this." On Good Friday she was thought to be dying, but Holy Saturday morning found her better.

Her spiritual life now began to radiate beams of the heaven whose foretaste she had enjoyed so many years. Now more than ever she strove to become *configuratus morti ejus*, "conformed to the death of Christ" (Phil. 3:10). Carrying a little statue of our Lady in her hand, whom she began to call her "Gate of Heaven," she reflected more and more the splendor of "eternal life begun." She began to live in the atmosphere of the Apocalypse more and more, suffering greatly, it is true, but happy with the happiness of heaven. Mother Germaine asked her on August 14, when she was about to enter her last retreat, "to note down her simple thoughts as to the way in which she understood or envisaged her vocation of the 'Praise of Glory.'" She understood and smilingly assented.

This little "mystical summa," as Father Philipon calls it, was written in a small notebook during her trying sleepless nights. When the book was full from cover to cover, she returned it to the Prioress on August 31.

Another set of prayers which she called "Heaven on Earth" and addressed to her sister Marguerite at about the same time completes the "writings" of the saint, if we include her "Prayer to the Trinity." Besides her letters, she has left us little in the way of doctrine; but that little is in reality "the one thing necessary."

On All Saints' Day, 1906, her last agony began. Her prayer on her deathbed was: "Spend my substance for Thy glory; let it distill, drop by drop, for Thy Church." Two days before her death, when the doctor admitted that her pulse was very weak, she said to him: "In two days I shall be in the bosom of my 'Three.' Our Lady, who is all bright, will herself take me by the hand and lead me to heaven." The doctor, who was not of the faith, was amazed at such happiness. Her last intelligible words were: "I am going to Light, to Love, to Life." On Friday, November 9, 1906, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity breathed her last at a quarter to six in the morning.



*Her Mission*

If God's glory is "the radiant manifestation of what He is," as Father Philipon says it is, truly Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity glorified Him as few souls in our century have done. But this glory was not hers alone to give to God; she bequeathed it to the whole Church. All our lives are lived in the shadow of the "Three," and no Christian life can be complete without this knowledge. Our Baptism, our Confirmation, and especially our daily Mass makes our life a Trinitarian thing. Therefore, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity has much to teach us.

Like the Little Flower, of whom she is in a way the complement, Sister Elizabeth prophesied her future mission. Wherever she has become known, her prophecy has come true. "It seems to me that in heaven my mission will be to draw souls, by helping them to go out of themselves in order to adhere to God by a very simple, wholly loving movement, and to maintain them in that great inner silence which allows God to imprint Himself on them, and to transform them into Himself."

Like St. John of the Cross, who asked souls, "created for these marvels and called to see them realized in you, what are you doing?" and like the Little Flower, who begged God to "cast Your divine eyes upon a multitude of little souls, worthy victims of Thy love," Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity wrote to her mother on August 2, 1906:

"Oh, would that I could tell all souls what a source of strength, of peace, and happiness they would find if they would consent to live in this intimacy. But they do not know *how to wait*. If God does not bestow Himself in a manner that they can feel, they leave His Holy Presence; and when He comes to them with all His gifts, He finds no one there; the soul has gone out to exterior things. They do not dwell in the depths of themselves."

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## The Repose of the Abyss

E. I. Watkin

NOT long ago I attended a performance of Anouilh's modern *Antigone*. A work of consummate literary art, it compelled me to give its theme imaginative though not rational assent. For it is written from the standpoint of a Sartrean existentialism. Everything was demolished: political integrity, moral principles, human nature, religious belief. At the close of the drama nothing was left except the bare fact of existence, stripped of any value beyond itself. When however obediently to the dramatist's art the willful suspension of belief had been made, a surprising revolution occurred never certainly intended by the author. This bare existence revealed within and beyond itself Existence, irreducible, irrefrangible, Being Absolute. It was in fact presented in terms of aesthetic intuition, the scholastic proof of God's existence from the fact of contingent being.

Such an intuition of Absolute Existence is indeed, however unformulated, obscure, subconscious, the final experience produced by tragedy, the catharsis its effects.

This experience, the profoundest attainable in the order of nature, a concrete and vital natural theology, is the point of insertion for the supernatural and mystical experience which was the theme of the young Carmelite, Elizabeth (Catez), who died fifty years ago in the Carmel of Dijon. In a monumental phrase forced by her intuition from one not endowed with literary art, Elizabeth speaks of "The repose of the abyss," which she promises as God's gift to the surrendered and faithful soul. The abyss is God's pure being, His infinity. In his illuminating study of Elizabeth's doctrine, Father

Hans Urs von Balthasar describes her experience of it. "To her, infinity was no mere word barren of significance, nor the experience of a void and nothingness beyond the trustworthy finite world. It was . . . a spiritual vision, a tangible experience, an ineluctable need. She did not meet God as Someone who possesses infinity along with other attributes; she encountered Infinity and knew at once that this was God. She saw the frontier, the very edge of the finite and the abyss beyond, only the moment she let herself go, she knew there was God."<sup>1</sup> This surely is the place where tragedy and metaphysics meet and together are met by the revelation and communication of God.

There is in fact a double abyss. One is the soul, its central depth, some mystics prefer the metaphor of height, a capacity to receive the Divine Plenitude. A capacity, no more than this, in itself emptiness, indigence, need, darkness, weakness, folly, sin. "A bottomless abyss nevertheless into which God can flow and pour Himself out."<sup>2</sup> For the other abyss is God.

The humility, therefore, which recognizes the abyss of the soul's emptiness and need finds the abyss of God: "To be plunged in humility is to be plunged in God. For God is the bottom of the abyss. Humility therefore like charity is always susceptible of growth."<sup>3</sup> "We must descend daily down into the abyss which is God. The one abyss calls to the other. There on this seafloor the divine encounter will take place, when the abyss of our nothingness, our wretchedness is confronted with the abyss of mercy, the immense all of God."<sup>4</sup> The two abysses are made one when the abyss of the soul's capacity and need is progressively filled by the abyss of God's infinity. "We must be recollected within ourselves, remaining silent in God's presence, while the soul sinks into the abyss, expands, takes fire and melts into Him in an unbounded plenitude."<sup>5</sup> "Such are interior souls, beings God has chosen to live within, in the depths of the bottomless abyss."<sup>6</sup> "The simple soul enters into herself and beholds

<sup>1</sup> *Elisabeth of Dijon*, Hans Urs von Balthasar, English translation, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> *La Servante de Dieu, Elisabeth de la Trinite*, Souvenirs, ed. 1945, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 313.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.



her own abyss, the sanctuary where she makes contact with the Holy Trinity. She has penetrated her depth to its bottom which is the gate of eternal life.”<sup>7</sup> “Let us fling ourselves into the utmost depth of the twofold abyss: God’s immensity, our own nonentity.”<sup>8</sup> “I have found my centre in the Divine abyss. . . . I plunge into the Infinite . . . my soul rests in this immensity.”<sup>9</sup> The soul must be and is being invaded, submerged, buried by God. “The Master is saying continually to my soul what He once said to Zaccheus: ‘make haste and come down.’ What then is the descent He asks us to make? A descent ever deeper into the abyss within ourselves.”<sup>10</sup> The descent is progressive until the deepest possible depth is reached. “When the soul knows God perfectly — that is, to the utmost of her capacity — loves and enjoys Him without reserve, she has reached the deepest centre she can attain in Him. Before she reached this point she was, it is true, already in God who is her centre but not in her deepest centre. For she could go further.”<sup>11</sup> “Elizabeth,” writes Father von Balthasar, “saw the life of the soul as a continuous advance into the depths of the Divine. . . . Each step is that of a lover entering the infinity of God. . . . ‘Grant’ she prays ‘that nothing may trouble my peace, or turn me from Thee, my immutable, but that every minute may draw me deeper into the abyss of Thy mystery.’”<sup>12</sup>

All this, it may be objected, is no new doctrine, no message peculiar to Elizabeth, but the traditional teaching of the mystics. Since God and the human soul and the relationship of the latter to the former are facts unchangeable through the passing generations, there is no place for novelty. Nevertheless, Elizabeth has her distinctive awareness of this abiding and universal truth, her individual experience of it; and her mission is to impart these to us. Moreover, she has an active personal mission to individual souls promised before death and being fulfilled ever since. “My mission,” she said and wrote, “in heaven will be to attract souls, assisting them

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 441.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 440.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 313–314.

<sup>12</sup> Balthasar, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–61.

to go out of themselves and hold fast to God by a movement perfectly simple, a motion of pure love, and to maintain them in the great interior silence which alone makes it possible for God to impress Himself upon them and transform them into Himself.”<sup>13</sup>

Change and mortality have hold upon all man's human and natural activities and purposes. In this abyss he receives the imperishable life of God. And his superficial activities, if in conformity with God's will, become expressions of the fundamental union with God, means by and in which God acts in the soul, the soul is acted by God. True, the soul is not always conscious of God's presence and action. For she must not depend upon extraordinary illuminations or sensible consolations, but must adhere to God's will, which is identical with God Himself, by a resigned surrendered faith. “When I had lost all help from creatures and even all ‘experienced’ divine assistance, I found myself in the happy necessity of falling into the pure Divine. . . . By losing all that is given, I found the Giver.”<sup>14</sup> These words of Madame Guyon would have received Elizabeth's assent. Paradoxically God is found by experience of His apparent absence, when faith cleaves to a Presence known to faith alone. There is therefore joy beneath and through suffering, rest in God beneath and in the midst of distracting thoughts and emotions. Every event is in the wide sense a sacrament whereby God communicates Himself to the spirit. The now of the passing present moment is the now, the abiding present of eternity. “My Master . . . bids me live like the Father in an eternal present without before or after, but wholly in the unity of my being in this eternal now,”<sup>15</sup> “in the likeness of the Unchangeable here below in an eternal present.”<sup>16</sup>

Man, in fact, lives two-dimensionally. He lives in the superficial dimension of his natural life, on the biological plane where his spirit is the soul, the organic form of an animal body. But he also lives in the depth, on the height, if that metaphor is preferred, where his spirit as such beneath or above its function of biological

<sup>13</sup> *La Servante de Dieu*, op. cit., p. 234.

<sup>14</sup> *The Archbishop and the Lady*, Count Michael de la Bedoyere, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> *La Servante de Dieu*, op. cit., p. 361.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

ensoulment is rooted in God and aspires to Him, makes contact with Him. Or we may call man amphibious, living both in the world of sense and in the world of spirit. The mystic, therefore, Elizabeth, is aware of the deeper dimension normally subconscious. Even so the consciousness is not continuously strong or pressingly evident. For in His utter transcendence, God is not clearly evident in this life. The experience is unique, indescribable, unintelligible; experience of a contact with Reality, so real that in terms of created realities it is unreal. There is peace, indeed, even joy, but sensible only in a peculiar, a unique fashion. The field of normal consciousness meanwhile may be occupied by distraction, dryness, obscurity, suffering, a sense even of God's absence. These, however, are accepted as God's will, and the acceptance is peace and, since God's will is God, a closer and stronger union with God. It is for this reason that the mystic describing his state often appears to contradict himself, as though he did, yet did not, experience the Divine Presence, and were united to God without experience of Him by faith which, however, is itself somehow an experience of God. "God in me and I in Him . . . how good it is to have God present in us, in the most hidden holy place of our souls. There we *can always find Him, even when His presence is no longer felt*. He is there, nonetheless, even closer to us. How good is the presence of God! Right in the depths, in the heaven of my soul, *I find Him*. For He never abandons me. God in me and I in Him — that is my whole life."<sup>17</sup> The paradox cannot be stated in terms of conceptual thinking. When, however, the mystic, in this case Elizabeth, speaks of it, what is deepest in myself responds to the testimony, knows that the report is true. Some mystical writers, for example the late Abbot Chapman in his letters, emphasize the negative nonexperimental aspect of this prayer of faith, of this abyss, others, like Elizabeth, the positive and experimental. And I find the latter more consoling, more encouraging. But there is no contradiction. For there emerges always "the repose of the abyss."

This experience, in fact, is not what I would call formal or essential knowledge, knowledge of the form, the nature of its object, what it is. It is what I would call existential knowledge, knowledge

<sup>17</sup> Balthasar, *op. cit.*, p. 76.



that its object exists. This knowledge is the experience of a contact between either the material energy, which is the human body, and a corporeal object or between the spiritual energy, the volition which is the human spirit, and an object corporeal or spiritual. In this central abyss, the radical will which is the substantial self makes contact with God. Through and in this radical will, the spirit touches Him, as its Object and final Objective, the supreme and ultimate good for which it has been made. Its nature, however, since it exceeds feeling, image, and concept is not revealed. The spirit knows that its will, its true self, has found its goal, but is ignorant of its nature. It is a touch in the dark, though the darkness is the excess of Divine Light blinding the understanding. Therefore does Elizabeth exclaim: *Nescivi*, "I know not"; and sets emotions and illuminations aside. The Presence is at the same time an Absence, the Absence of any object of normal experience or knowledge. Thus the intellectual, the intuition aspect or result of the existential and volitional contact is apparently negative, though in fact positive. Elizabeth, it is true, does not concern herself with the philosophical or theological explanation of her experience, as Father von Balthasar has pointed out, she makes no use of the apophatic or negative theology. It is, nonetheless, implicit in her experience of the contact of the double abyss, the Divine Infinity invading the capacity of a spirit capable and in need of Infinite Good, the invasion consequent upon the unreserved surrender of the will which is the spirit's very self. Only in its terms can we interpret what she tells us of the repose of the abyss.

"God," Elizabeth writes, "so St. Denys tells us, is the great Solitary. My Master bids me imitate this perfection and pay Him homage by being a great solitary. The Divine Being dwells in an eternal, an unbounded solitude. He never leaves it, even when He provides for His creatures' needs. For He never goes out of Himself and this solitude is nothing else than His Godhead. That nothing may withdraw me from this delightful interior silence, my condition must always be the same, the same isolation, separation, poverty. Unless my desires, fears, joys, and griefs, and all the motions aroused by these four passions are wholly directed towards God, I shall not be solitary. There will be noise in my soul. The powers of my soul

must be stilled and laid asleep."<sup>18</sup> "On Mount Carmel in silence, solitude, continual prayer, the Carmelite lives already in heaven, in God alone. The same God who will one day be her happiness and satisfy her in glory already gives Himself to her, never leaves her, dwells in her soul; nay, He makes her one with Him. For that reason she longs for silence, so as to listen to Him, to penetrate further His Infinite Being. She is one with Him whom she loves; she finds Him everywhere. In everything she sees His reflection. Often the need of silence is such that she can only sit at the Master's feet like Mary, eager to hear all He says; to penetrate deeper and deeper into the mystery of love."<sup>19</sup> "Contemplation leads to possession, and this simple possession is eternal life tasted in the bottomless place where above reason there awaits us the profound peace of the Divine Immutability"<sup>20</sup>

Though Carmel is silence, silence need not be Carmel. For it is the silence of the abyss present in every human soul, when God of His grace gives Himself to her. Elizabeth, therefore, can invite her sister Marguerite to enter it, though married and a mother. "When you are distracted by your many duties, every hour if you wish, you may enter the central depth of your soul where the Divine Guest dwells. . . . However occupied you may be, you can withdraw into this solitude, our Father's house, and there surrender yourself to the Holy Spirit that He may transform you into God, may imprint upon your soul the image of His Divine Being."<sup>21</sup>

Why then Carmel? What is possible everywhere in Carmel is easiest. Where life in the superficial, natural dimension is deliberately restricted and simplified, human attachments renounced, entry into the profound dimension of spirit, the seat of supernatural life, is correspondingly facilitated. But Carmel does not compel entry nor does life in the world exclude it. The vocation moreover, as Elizabeth is well aware, to enter the abyss and find its repose is not for all, not even all practicing Catholics in a state of grace. It is addressed only to those who even, if in the world, are not of the world, and by their acceptance of it they withdraw in respect of

<sup>18</sup> *La Servante de Dieu, op. cit.*, p. 362.

<sup>19</sup> *Balthasar, op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>20</sup> *La Servante de Dieu, op. cit.*, p. 318.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159.

their deepest and most real life from the world. They become, in fact, as Elizabeth saw them, extraconventual Carmelites — or other contemplative religious, tertiaries, oblates in spirit, if not also in the letter.<sup>22</sup> And as the existence of tertiaries or oblates depends on the existence of the Order to which they are affiliated, the existence of these spiritual tertiaries of contemplative prayer depends upon the existence of contemplative religious. Though the repose of the abyss is not confined to Carmel and other contemplative houses, they are indispensable, in the normal order at least, that the wider vocation may be given and received.

Certainly there is offered to us who study and appreciate Elizabeth's teaching, a special invitation. The vocation accepted; human life, whatever the texture of its surface, acquires a new depth, a new reality, a new meaning. "We must live in the supernatural, must realize God's intimate presence in our soul and perform all our actions in His company. Then our life is never commonplace, even when we are engaged in the most humdrum occupations. A supernatural soul is not concerned with second 'created' causes but with God alone." For second causes belong to the superficial dimension of nature not to the underlying dimension of Divine Reality. "Her life is correspondingly simplified."<sup>23</sup> "A simple intention" to adhere to God and conform to His will here and now "gathers up into one all the scattered powers of the soul and makes the spirit a unity. It is simplicity that offers God homage and praise. . . . The simple soul passing through all creatures and penetrating them finds God in its depth" as the Reality in which their half reality is grounded and by which it is sustained in being. "Simplicity is the beginning and the end of the virtues, their splendor and glory. I call the intention simple which looks to God alone and refers all things to Him. It places man in His presence, gives him light and courage, frees him from all fear today and on the day of judgment. It is the slope that leads the soul inwards, the foundation of the entire spiritual life. It bestows peace and silences the idle noises which make themselves heard in our souls."<sup>24</sup> Simplicity is unity,

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth nowhere speaks of Carmelite tertiaries.

<sup>23</sup> *La Servante de Dieu*, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 323-324.





# PRAYER OF A PRAISE OF GLORY TO THE TRINITY

O my God, Trinity whom I adore! Help me to become utterly forgetful of self, that I may bury myself in Thee, as changeless and as calm as though my soul were already in eternity. May nothing disturb my peace, or draw me out of Thee, O my immutable Lord! but may I at every moment penetrate more deeply into the depths of Thy Mystery!

Give peace to my soul; make it Thy heaven, Thy cherished dwelling place, Thy home of rest. Let me never leave Thee there alone, but keep me there, all absorbed in Thee, in living faith, adoring Thee and wholly yielded up to Thy creative action!

O my Christ, whom I love crucified by love, fain would I be the bride of Thy Heart; fain would I cover Thee with glory and love Thee . . . until I die of very love! Yet I realize my weakness and beseech Thee to clothe me with Thyself, to identify my soul with all the movements of Thine own. Immerse me in Thyself; possess me wholly; substitute Thyself for me that my life may be but a radiance of Thine own. Enter my soul as Adorer, as Restorer, as Saviour!

O Eternal Word, Utterance of my God! I long to pass my life in listening to Thee, to become docile, that I may learn all from Thee. Through all darkness, all privations, all helplessness, I crave to keep Thee ever with me and to dwell beneath Thy lustrous beams. O my beloved Star! so hold me that I cannot wander from Thy light!

O Consuming Fire! Spirit of Love! descend within me and reproduce in me, as it were, an incarnation of the Word; that I may be to Him another humanity wherein He renews His Mystery!

And Thou, O Father, bend down toward Thy poor little creature and overshadow her, beholding in her none other than Thy beloved Son in whom Thou hast set all Thy pleasure.

O my Three, my All, my Beatitude, Infinite Solitude, Immensity wherein I lose myself! I yield myself to Thee as Thy prey. Bury Thyself in me that I may be buried in Thee, until I depart to contemplate in Thy Light the abyss of Thy greatness!

*(Composed by Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, Carmelite, "Praise of Glory," after renewal of vows, feast of the Presentation of Mary, November 21, 1904.)*

(Continued from page 163)

unity is union with the One God. "On these divine summits the Divine Unity is perfected between God and the soul," for she receives the One.<sup>25</sup> "The soul's entire being must be unified. . . . Then will the King be enamoured of her beauty. For beauty is unity, the Divine beauty at any rate."<sup>26</sup>

Unity is the ideal of science, as it progressively subsumes a multiplicity of facts and subordinate laws under laws ever fewer and more general, establishing equations. A work of art is great to the degree in which it organizes a whole of consistent and coherent parts, components harmoniously united. This ultimate unity, spiritual, supernatural, divine, is simpler, more perfect than those conceptual or aesthetic unities. "Simplicity increases from hour to hour our likeness to God; then dispensing with all intermediaries it will transport us into the depth where God dwells and give us the repose of the abyss." There is a reciprocal action of cause and effect, effect and cause. The repose of the abyss, as the Divine Abyss invades the human, simplifies the spirit, and the progressive simplification in turn enables the soul to enter more deeply the double abyss, enabling the divine occupation to be more powerful, more complete. "It is simplicity that will give us our eternal inheritance. Simplicity is the entire life of 'these' spirits, their entire virtue, their likeness to God. Their supreme repose is enjoyed on the summit, in simplicity, and in the measure of its love each spirit seeks God at a deeper level within its own depth. The simple soul upheld by the power of her inward gaze re-enters herself and in her abyss contemplates the sanctuary wherein she makes contact with the Blessed Trinity. She has thus dived to the ocean floor of her being which is the gate of eternal life."<sup>27</sup>

To get to the bottom of things reaching by thought a simple explanation and ground of phenomena is the ideal of scientist and philosopher; to present it to the imagination and by communicated intuition is the ideal of art; these are exceeded and fulfilled existentially by a vital union with Ultimate Reality, by the simple penetration of the Divine Abyss filling the abyss of the human

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 362-363.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.



spirit to which it is Elizabeth's mission to direct us. Elizabeth found food for her prayer and doctrinal illumination in a number of passages full of meaning from the writings chiefly of St. Paul and St. John. This passage in particular from the Epistle to the Ephesians was decisive for her: "He chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and unspotted in his sight in charity. He has predestined us to be his adopted children through Jesus Christ, according to his decree, to the praise of the glory of his grace." "Praise of glory": Elizabeth took this for her designation, the expression of what God from all eternity had predestined her to be. The experience of the abyss, its repose is adoration. "How," she writes, "can I imitate in the heaven of my soul the unceasing worship of the Blessed in the heaven of glory? How may I share this hymn of praise, this uninterrupted adoration? . . . To be rooted and grounded in love is the state, it seems to me, in which I can fulfill worthily my office of praise of glory." "The soul that penetrates these depths of God and dwells in them . . . and in consequence does everything in Him, with Him, and for Him, with the pure regard which gives her a resemblance to His simple Being, by her every movement, aspiration, action however commonplace is rooted more deeply in Him she loves; everything in her pays homage to the thrice Holy God: she is, so to speak, a perpetual *Sanctus*, a never ceasing praise of glory. . . . The soul must first plunge into the depth of her nothingness. . . . Then she will be able to adore. Adoration is a heavenly word. It can be described as the ecstasy of love. It is love overwhelmed by the beauty, power, infinite greatness of the Beloved. It faints and sinks into the depth of a perfect silence. . . . The silence is the hymn of praise sung everlastingly in the fellowship of the calm Trinity; the last effort of the soul that can say no more."<sup>28</sup> "A praise of glory: it is a soul that dwells in God and loves Him with a pure and disinterested love. . . . She must be incapable of willing anything except what God wills. A praise of glory: it is a silent soul, a lyre ready for the mysterious touch of the Holy Spirit that He may evoke from it divine harmonies. A praise of glory: it is a soul that fixes her gaze upon God in faith

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 356-357.

and simplicity and reflects all He is. It is a bottomless abyss into which He can flow and pour Himself forth, a crystal through which He can shine and in which He can behold His perfections and splendor. A soul that permits the Divine Being to satisfy in her His need to communicate all He is and all He possesses is in truth praise of the glory of all His gifts. Praise of glory is a state of uninterrupted thanksgiving. Every one of the soul's actions, motions, thoughts, aspirations, as it roots her more deeply in love echoes the eternal *Sanctus*. . . . In the heaven of the soul, praise of glory begins already its eternal office. . . . Though not always consciously the soul is always singing, always adoring."<sup>29</sup>

Elizabeth, we should observe, has seen clearly that the sole glory God asks of the soul or that she can give Him is to make it possible for Him to give Himself to her, admit her into His own life, deify her. "Every soul in heaven," and heaven may be anticipated on earth, "is fixed in pure love and lives no longer her own life but God's. . . . Her understanding is God's understanding, her will His will, her love, His own love."<sup>30</sup>

"Deify" however should more strictly be called "Christify." For, as Elizabeth sees it, deification is a progressive assimilation to Christ, God made man, indeed identification with Him. "My only wish is to be identified with Jesus. 'Christ is my life' . . . The object of this retreat is to conform us more closely to our adored Master, nay more, to fuse us with Him so intimately that we can say: 'I live no longer. It is He who lives in me.'"<sup>31</sup> "Every day I decrease, die, renounce myself more perfectly that Christ may grow and be exalted in me. I dwell, a very little one, in the depth of my poverty. I see my nothingness, my misery, my impotence. . . . My soul's delight, a delight not of feeling but will, is everything which sacrifices, destroys, abases me. For I desire to make room for my Master. It is no longer I who live but He lives in me. I would live no longer my own life but would be transformed into Jesus Christ that my life may be more divine than human and the Father, as He bends over me, may say 'this is my dearly be-

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 338-339.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 337-338.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

loved daughter in whom I am well pleased.'"<sup>32</sup> "I die daily," St. Paul exclaimed. "This doctrine of the dying self . . . though it seems so harsh becomes deliciously sweet when we consider the result of this death, the substitution of God's life for our own life of sin and wretchedness."<sup>33</sup> "The soul dies and flows into God."<sup>34</sup> When "God gives Himself to the soul, all her movements become divine and, though they are God's are just as much hers. For Our Lord performs them in her and with her."<sup>35</sup>

Christ enters the soul, a continuous advent, "always for the first time as though He had never come before. For His arrival is timeless, an eternal present and an eternal desire renews everlastingly the joys of His advent. . . . The soul, her capacity enlarged by the Master's coming, seems to go out of herself and enter the immensity of Him who has come to her. God, therefore, in our depth welcomes God when He comes to us and God contemplates God."<sup>36</sup> "Since their mutual affection makes everything common to both, the loving soul is placed on a footing of equality with Christ."<sup>37</sup> "When love has been made perfect . . . the soul will have been transformed so thoroughly that she will be very like God. To such a soul, whose life has its source within herself, may be addressed the words addressed by Père Lacordaire to Magdalen: "Ask no more for your Master, ask no one on earth, no one in heaven. For He is your soul, and your soul is He."<sup>38</sup>

A poem addressed to a nun in her Carmel, a novice I think, versifies, for Elizabeth was no poet, the doctrine it was her mission to deliver, the mystery and repose of the abyss. "Are you aware of your riches? Have you ever plumbed the abyss of love? I will show you the unchanging tenderness that broods over your soul, night and day. Let your faith contemplate with a gaze perfectly simple the mystery hidden but active in your heart. The Holy Spirit has chosen you to be His temple. You belong to yourself no longer, and in this are you great. Abide in silence under the touch of God that

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 316-317, 158.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 313.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.



He may imprint upon you the Saviour's image. To this likeness you were predestined by the Creator's mysterious design. In truth you are no more yourself but are becoming Himself. Every moment the transformation proceeds. Give God thanks for His sovereign decree, and let your entire being sink down in adoration. Always believe in love whatever befalls: if God seems to sleep in your heart's core, awaken Him not. For it is another grace. . . . I dream of seeing you . . . behave always as becomes a bride making all your honor the honor of your Saviour. Beneath the sacrificial hand be calm and unperturbed like the Christ you love who in all His sufferings remained the Strong One and kept perfect peace even in agony and anguish of soul. In all things contemplate this Divine Exemplar in order to reproduce Him faithfully. So shall you render the Father measureless glory and He will keep you in His love."<sup>39</sup>

All the intertwined themes of Elizabeth's message are here, the aspects and context of the divine-human abyss. It is Christ in the soul, the praise of glory veiled, "the hope of glory" to be revealed.

Christ, however, is inseparable from His members. Union, therefore, with Christ is union with His Church, the total Christ, identification with Christ identification with His Church. Elizabeth, it is true, blinded by the excessive individualism of contemporary religion, had no eyes for the passages in which St. Paul speaks of Christ's mystical body, or St. Augustine's applications of the doctrine in homilies of the Divine Office. She thinks not corporately of the Church as Christ's mystical body but of the union, the identification of individual Christians, with Christ. Of the communion of souls, however, affected by their individual union she is fully and powerfully aware. For all its repose the abyss of union with Christ is a focus, a source of apostolic activity directed to the entire Church actual and possible, living and dead. Elizabeth, indeed, refused a request to seek sensible contact with a particular departed soul as being contrary to her attitude of faith. The attempt, in fact, would savor more of spiritualism than Catholic mysticism. But she pointed out that in her prayer she was in close union with the dead, therefore with that particular person. And toward the living she exercised a constant ministry of intercession, not surely so much by

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 442-443.

formulated petitions as by taking them and their needs with her into the abyss, into God. To cease from activity is not to cease from action. On the contrary, in this repose of the abyss, action is too intense, too concentrated for activity; it is the "motionless action" of Aristotle's Deity. Elizabeth conceives of the contemplative, of the Carmelite nun as a "priestess," the interior, the mystical counterpart and complement of the sacramental priest, who in virtue of this identification with Christ shares spiritually His offering of Himself for the world, as the priest shares it sacramentally and as officially accredited by the Church to offer her sacrifice. She views "the offices of priest and Carmelite as closely similar, interpenetrating, and complementary. She understands the apostolate of the Carmelite as similar to that of the priest."<sup>40</sup> "In particular her prioress is the priestess who consecrates and sacrifices her to God."<sup>41</sup> Moreover, in virtue of the same identification with Christ, she is the victim offered, the host which the Divine Human Priest offers to His Father, and she can therefore be offered mystically by the priest who in the Mass represents His sacrifice. "She was always asking priests to consecrate and transform her in the Mass along with the great Host Christ, as a little host of praise so that her whole being down to its roots might become praise and service. Consecrate me to Him tomorrow at Holy Mass."<sup>42</sup> Many years before the liturgical revival brought back into the foreground of Catholic theology and worship the intimate co-operation and truly sacrificial action of the congregation in the offering of the Mass, Elizabeth had discovered and experienced it in her experience of identification with Christ. She however does not appear to have noticed a text in the Second Epistle to Timothy which sanctions this view of herself as a sacrificial victim, and particularly in view of the approaching sacrifice to death: "*Ego jam delibor*" — "I am already being offered up in sacrifice."

This identification with Christ involves also sharing His relationship to the Father and Holy Spirit, His part in the life of the Blessed Trinity. As her title in religion professes, Elizabeth, like St. John of

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<sup>40</sup> Balthasar, *op. cit.*, pp. 118–119.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

the Cross, had a special devotion to the Trinity. She was intensely, vitally conscious of her fellowship in Christ and as one with Christ with the Three Divine Persons, of their dwelling in her spirit, of her participation in their Trinitarian life. Into that life she is already vanishing on earth. "My boat, dear Mother, was afloat on the broad waters. Through a calm night in profound silence I glided softly over the vast ocean. All beneath the vault of heaven was at rest and seemed to be listening to the voice of the Eternal. Suddenly waves rose up and the billows engulfed my frail skiff. It was the Trinity that opened its bosom to me and I have found my centre in the Divine abyss. No more shall I be seen on shore. I plunge into the Infinite. . . . My soul rests in this immensity and lives with the Three as in eternity."<sup>43</sup> For "except for the beatific vision we possess God in just the same way as the Blessed above."<sup>44</sup> And when Elizabeth dies her soul will, so she foretold, take flight into the Triune life of God. Thus "the repose of the abyss" is the spirit's rest in God Three and One, substantially even here on earth, with clear vision in the life of heaven. Such was "the repose of the abyss" Elizabeth entered and possesses, and into which in this fiftieth year after death she is inviting us to enter with her.

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<sup>43</sup> *La Servante de Dieu, op. cit.*, p. 440.

<sup>44</sup> Balthasar, *op. cit.*, p. 76.



*Readers of SPIRITUAL LIFE, from the beginning, have expressed keen interest in Father Gabriel's articles. Fortunately he was a prolific writer, and we should be able to satisfy his avid readers for some time to come. The following is a translation of portions of the article entitled "Realizzazioni" from the November, 1943, issue of Vita Carmelitana.*

## The Indwelling in Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity

*Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.*

SINCE they are called to intimate union with God, Carmelites turn spontaneously to the dogma of the divine indwelling and nourish their souls upon it, aspiring naturally, as it were, to "live with the Trinity." Nevertheless, in realizing this common vocation, they present a most beautiful and interesting variety, which contains some very profound teachings for souls who desire to follow this path. It is true that the way is substantially one, but it is accompanied by widely varied modalities and nuances, which make it possible for us better to understand just what is truly essential to the way of union and what must be considered accidental, albeit at times very helpful, to our progress. We should know how to esteem every gift of God, but on the other hand, we must not think that the Lord leads us by a path of our own choosing. He is the Master of His gifts.

We shall here study the attractive figure of Elizabeth of the Trinity, who seems to have received a providential mission with regard to the life of intimacy with God. In her, union with the Trinity was realized not so much by means of clear intellectual illumination as by pure faith with an experience of love.

Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity has been called the "Saint of the divine indwelling."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. M. Philipon, O.P., *The Spiritual Doctrine of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Bookshop, 1947). Obviously this title of "saint" is not intended to anticipate the judgment of the Church; it is used merely as a "descriptive" denomination.

This humble Carmelite, who died in 1906 at Dijon at the age of twenty-six, and is now so well known among spiritual persons, certainly merits this title. She not only lived in a most formal manner the life of intimacy with the three divine Persons present in her soul, but she radiated this life to such an extent that she became its apostle, all the more effective because she was discreet; moreover, before she died, she had a presentiment of a heavenly mission: "I believe that in heaven," she wrote to one of her sisters, "my mission will be to draw souls to interior recollection, by helping them to go out of themselves in order to adhere to God by a movement of pure simplicity and love, remaining in that great interior silence which permits God to imprint Himself upon them." And Elizabeth has carried out this mission, as appears from the testimony of countless souls who, under her influence, have drawn very close to God.

Elizabeth was a true spiritual daughter of St. John of the Cross and assimilated his teachings, adding to them delicate personal shadings; she referred the doctrine of the Saint to those beautiful, divinely inspired texts of St. Paul, and succeeded in constructing a lucid synthesis of the spiritual life, combining introduction to intimate life with the Trinity and progressive assimilation to Christ. Although of a practical character, the union effected in Elizabeth's doctrine between these two central mysteries of the Christian religion does not fail to throw light upon the speculative aspect of the question as well. This results from the marvelous formulas in which Elizabeth expresses her doctrine with such perfection that one instinctively suspects the influence of some divine charism upon the mind of the young girl who, although intelligent, did not have any more intellectual training than that provided by the intermediate schools.

In Elizabeth's whole life we cannot fail to admire the hand of Divine Providence, which gradually prepared her to become, for our own times, the new herald of the great gift of the divine indwelling. God directed her from childhood toward this great mystery, so that even before entering Carmel her personal motto was: "God in me and I in Him!" As a religious, she concentrated completely upon trying to live "heaven on earth," upon striving to enjoy

in a continuous manner the presence of Him whom we shall possess in heaven. But more important than our enjoyment of God is His own glory. In the final year of her life, the Lord called upon Sister Elizabeth to become "praise of glory" of the Most Holy Trinity. Her last months on earth were characterized by an intimate participation in the life of love which unfolds in the bosom of the Trinity.

### A. God in Us

The baptismal name she received as an infant was a presage. Elizabeth means "house of God." While visiting Carmel on the day of her First Communion, the child learned this from the Mother Prioress. Elizabeth was much impressed, and the Reverend Mother, as a keepsake, wrote on a holy card: "Your name contains a great mystery, which today is fulfilled in you, my daughter; your heart on earth, Elizabeth, is a house of God, a house of the God of love."

She was now eleven years old; three years later she was "embraced" by the divine Master, who bound her to Himself by the vow of virginity. From then on, as we read in the *Reminiscences* written by the Mother Prioress (Mother Germaine of Jesus, who was first her novice mistress and then her superior during the entire five years she spent in Carmel), Elizabeth experienced the graces of recollection which gave her a true sense of the presence of God within her, so that she felt the need of questioning her confessors about it. The latter, from prudence, thought it better not to dwell upon the contemplative state of the young girl. At the age of nineteen, while reading St. Teresa's *Way of Perfection*, she recognized that she had often experienced the graces of contemplation described by the Saint (the prayer of quiet). Like the great Saint, Elizabeth was to seek an explanation of this new sense of the nearness and presence of God that she experienced within herself. Was He truly present within her soul?

A few months before her admission to Carmel, God willed that, like her holy mother Teresa, she too should receive an explanation from a venerable Dominican. In her case, it was the Reverend Father Vallée. "The venerable Father," Mother Germaine relates, "after having explained to her how God is within us by His essence,



power, and presence, undertook to explain to her the text of Saint Paul: 'Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells within you?' (1 Cor., 3:17). He developed this passage by showing how, with the grace of Baptism, we become this spiritual temple, when the Holy Spirit, with the other divine Persons Who are inseparable from Him, come to take up Their abode in us." With the force of his inspired words he replied in this manner to the confidential questions of the young girl, whom he reassured with the words: "Certainly, my daughter, the Father is in you, the Son is in you, the Holy Spirit is in you!" Listening to this dogmatic explanation, which gave her full assurance concerning what she was experiencing, she became so absorbed in it that she wanted the good Father to cease speaking and be silent. And the latter soon perceived that Elizabeth was no longer listening: she had found the light that was to illumine her whole life and she now longed to concentrate upon it in silence. "I saw her carried away like a wave out to sea," said Father Vallée, describing this conversation which had such influence upon Sister Elizabeth's interior life. Turning as if by instinct toward the new light that was exercising such a power of attraction over her, she found herself suddenly and fully upon the path of silent contemplation of the Trinity dwelling within her.<sup>2</sup>

A short time later we find that Elizabeth has formulated her motto: "*God in me and I in Him*; let this be our motto," she wrote to a friend. "How greatly we benefit from this presence of God in us, in the interior sanctuary of our soul!" "*God in me, I in Him*, oh! that is my life . . ." she wrote to the venerable Canon who, before she entered the monastery, had been to some extent her spiritual father. "How greatly we benefit from pondering that, except for the beatific vision, we already possess Him as the blessed possess Him in heaven!" And she adds confidentially: "I have not yet told you what my name shall be in Carmel! . . . Mary Elizabeth of the Trinity; it seems to me that this name indicates a particular vocation. . . . I love so much this mystery of the Trinity: it is an abyss in which I become lost. . . ."

A few days after having crossed the threshold of the monas-

<sup>2</sup> This information is taken from Philipon, *op. cit.*, Chap. I, par. 1, No. 8.

tery, Elizabeth answered a questionnaire that had been given to her, as a form of spiritual recreation, concerning the life of the soul. In reply to the question: "What is your motto?" the novice wrote: "*God in me, I in Him!*"

### B. In the Heaven of the Soul

A year and a half later (January 11, 1903) the happy day of her profession arrived. During this time she had passed through an interior purification which freed her from a sensibility that was still too much alive. Elizabeth, along with the rest of the community, made the traditional holy vigil in which the entire religious family assembled in choir, before our Lord, to implore His mercies for the young woman who was about to consecrate herself to Him. At that time she received an illumination which gave a new direction to her spiritual life: "During the night that preceded the great day (of profession)" she wrote to the venerable Canon who had guided her in her youth, "while I was in choir awaiting the Spouse, *I understood that my heaven was beginning on earth: the heaven of faith, with suffering and immolation for Him whom I love.*" This realization was not something totally new to her. Some time before, she had received another grace which had directed her along the same lines. In a letter of 1902 she wrote: "It seems to me that I have found my heaven on earth, since heaven is God and God is in my soul. The day that I understood this, all became clear to me." It seems that, in Elizabeth, the light penetrated gradually so as to show her precisely the way she was to follow. Assuredly the grace of illumination received on her profession day had mapped out a program for her. Now it was a matter of *living heaven*, and on this earth: by faith and love manifested in suffering and immolation.

During these same first months she came across a thought, attributed to St. John of the Cross, which inflamed her: "Faith means being face to face in darkness." St. John explains how faith, though obscure, makes us know God "as He is," that is, in His nature, in His intimate life: it puts us in an intellectual relationship with the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. It teaches us that, in the soul living in grace, the Father, the Son, the Holy

Spirit are really present, as Objects of knowledge and love. We can live together with Them . . . as faith tells us we are invited to do!

"The Carmelite," wrote Elizabeth, "draws all her happiness from this divine source: faith. She believes, as St. John says, 'in the love that God has for her': she believes that this same love caused Him to descend to earth and into her soul, because He Who called Himself the Truth said in the Gospel: 'Abide in me and I in you.' Then, with all simplicity, she obeys this sweet command; she lives intimately with God Who dwells within her and is more present to her than she is to herself."

"Love dwells in us," she continued elsewhere; "and therefore my sole exercise is to enter into myself and to lose myself in Them Who dwell within me. I am Elizabeth of the Trinity, that is Elizabeth who disappears and allows herself to be invaded by the Three."

Elizabeth truly experienced this "divine invasion." During her first retreat after profession, in order to render an account of the state of her soul, her eyes aglow, she could only speak these few words to her Mother Prioress: "He communicates to me eternal life."

Moreover, Elizabeth realized the prerequisite for this divine communication: to preserve the soul in that interior silence which can be attained only by the continuous mortification of all natural impulses: "We must have silence. . . . I want to be silent in order to give Him every opportunity to communicate Himself to me." This was her constant program. But we must not have any illusions about Elizabeth's passivity. Her passive silence was an outgrowth of that active silence by which she placed a check upon her nature, mortifying it continually. "To live always with Him presupposes great mortification, because to unite oneself continually with Him requires that one know how to give all. When a soul is faithful to the least desires of His heart, Jesus, for His part, is faithful in protecting it, and a sweet intimacy is established between the two." Note that "heaven on earth," along with faith and love, also demands immolation. The latter, moreover, is very precious: "Suffering is something so great, so divine! It seems to



me that if the blessed in heaven could envy us anything, it would be this! It is a powerful lever that acts upon the Heart of God; and then, is it not sweet to be able to 'give' to Him Whom one loves? The cross is the inheritance of Carmel." The Carmelite learns this love for suffering in the school of Jesus: "A Carmelite is a soul who has gazed upon the divine Crucified; she has seen Him offer Himself as Victim to the Father. Concentrating upon this vision of Christ's charity, she has understood His passion of love and has willed to offer herself up along with Him."

Here is, in practice, the program, as Elizabeth wrote it to a seminarian, anticipating in some way what she would formulate in a more exact and lofty manner in her famous "prayer": "We must draw very close to the Master, communicate with His soul, identify ourselves with all His movements and then set out with Him to do the Father's will." Thus the soul will strip itself of its own will to cling lovingly to the will of God and to become immersed in Him. Then there will awaken in it a living faith in the "immense" love of Him who dwells within it: "All that I encounter is a message or confirmation of the immense love of God; I cannot live otherwise. To reach the ideal life of the soul requires, I believe, to live in the supernatural, *to become aware that God dwells within us and then to go about all things with Him.* Then one is never earthly, even in the most ordinary actions, because one does not live in these things, but rises above them. A supernatural soul does not deal with 'secondary' causes, but only with God. Oh, how simplified her life is! How closely she resembles the blessed!" In such manner one lives "heaven on earth."

Two years later Elizabeth expressed this life of union with the immolated Christ, terminating in a continuous "contemplative attention" to the Trinity present within her soul, in that masterful prayer, so full of doctrine that it has become the nourishment of many interior souls:

Elizabeth desires to become immersed, motionless and serene, in the bosom of the tranquil Trinity: in this manner eternity will begin for her on this earth; thus she needs peace, that peace which comes from having entirely forgotten herself.

Christ, her beloved Spouse, will teach her the way: He who

has drawn her along in His footsteps, inviting her to a life of union and collaboration with Himself, will invade her with His grace, which will free her from herself.

And while this transformation is taking place, there will be established an intimacy with the three divine Persons, who will communicate Themselves to the soul that has become silent and peaceful: the Word will impress upon her the divine light which will ultimately fascinate her by establishing her in God. The Spirit of Love will invest her life with a divine impulse in such a manner that Elizabeth will become a living image of her crucified Love, and the heavenly Father, recognizing in her His Son, will find His delight in her.

After the invasion of grace comes the divine invasion. Elizabeth desires this to be total: she offers herself to the Trinity as Its prey, she wants It to be contained in her so that even on this earth she may be contained in It.

This magnificent prayer, "one of the most beautiful known to Christian literature,"<sup>3</sup> burst forth from Elizabeth's pen (nor did she make any changes in it thereafter) on November 21, 1904. It is a synthesis of the thoughts which, little by little, had matured in her soul. This seems particularly true with regard to her attitude toward the divine Persons. As early as June, 1903, she had written to a seminarian: "Pray that I may be able to live to the full my offering as spouse, that I may be completely at His disposal, completely alive in my faith, so that the Master may be able to bear me wherever He wills. I want to keep continually close to Him Who knows the whole mystery, in order to learn all from Him. *The language of the Word is the infusion of His gift*, He speaks thus to our soul in silence." We know from this clear explanation that Elizabeth is actually awaiting from the Word that infusion of contemplative light with which the soul is established in the Divinity. She is obviously aspiring to that infused and mystical contemplation in which the soul is supernaturally enlightened and which, moreover, as we have already seen, she experienced from her early youth. But she does not speak of manifestations of the Holy Trinity like those described by St.

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<sup>3</sup> This judgment is expressed by Philipon, *op. cit.*, Chap. III, No. 1.

Teresa of Jesus. At this time there is nothing of that sort in Elizabeth's life. Her attitude toward the three divine Persons is simply the fruit of faith illumined by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And precisely because of this, she is of particular interest to us.

In her various letters Elizabeth speaks of the relationships of the three divine Persons to us; these letters are all subsequent to her prayer, except for one in which she wrote to an aspirant to Carmel: "May the Father cover you with His shadow, and may this shadow be like a cloud that surrounds you and separates you (from everything); may the Word impress upon you His beauty, to be contemplated by your soul as another self; may the Holy Spirit, Who is Love, make of your heart a little hearth which may cheer the three divine Persons with the warmth of its flames." Nine months after having composed her prayer, Elizabeth wrote to her sister: "You can retire into this solitude (of the soul) in order to abandon yourself to the Holy Spirit, so that He may transform you into God, impress upon your soul the image of His divine beauty, so that the Father, looking down upon you, may see nothing but His Christ and may say to you: Behold my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased." The following year, when she was already living to the full her vocation as praise of glory, she wrote again to the same person: "The Father will cover you with His shadow by placing a cloud between you and all the things of earth to keep you entirely as His own, He will communicate His power to you so that you may love Him with a love as strong as death. The Word will project into your soul as in a crystal the image of His own beauty, so that you may be pure with His purity, luminous with His light. May the Holy Spirit transform you into a mystical lyre: silence, under His divine touch, will produce a magnificent canticle of love." And to the same person she again wrote some weeks later: "I am preparing a great 'novena' for you: every morning I recite Sext for you (it is the hour of the Word), begging Him so to impress Himself upon your soul that you may become another self to Him. And during the hour of None, which I consecrate to the Father, I ask Him to possess you as a daughter of predilection; may *the strength of His right hand* lead you in all your ways and direct you more



and more toward the abyss where He dwells and wishes you to be enclosed with Him." Here she is treating, as can be clearly seen, of delicate "appropriations" substantially identical, despite the variety of nuances. And this profound theological sense is remarkable in a young girl who had not studied, but who was enlightened by God. Interior souls who seek intimacy with the divine Persons will profit from the light she enjoyed.

If Elizabeth has the "mission" of teaching souls to "live with the Trinity," we can profit by her personal experiences. She dispels the anxiety of those souls who do not succeed in seeking God *within themselves*, and who on the other hand can easily picture God as close to them or themselves in God. In fact, she wrote expressly to the mother whom she had taught with such love to "live with God": "If you prefer, think that God is near you rather than in you; follow your own bent, provided that you live with Him as with One Who loves us." St. Teresa also had received an analogous light in one of her revelations: "Understand these words," she wrote on June 30, 1571: "you ought not to strive to keep Me enveloped within yourself, but rather to envelop yourself in Me."

"I should like to tell my secret to all those I love," Elizabeth wrote in that letter in which she spoke for the first time of having found her heaven on earth. And in reality she became the apostle of the divine indwelling for all those with whom she had personal contact. We have already seen how she spoke to her mother. For her dear sister, shortly before her death, she composed a brief treatise intended to explain "how one can find heaven on earth." The plan remained substantially the same as that Elizabeth had perceived on the day of her profession, but here it is formulated with a clarity that doubtless flows from experience. When she wrote these pages, Elizabeth had arrived at the final period of her spiritual life, in which she was conscious of her vocation as praise of glory and felt the mystery of Love being revealed in the depths of her soul. These lofty graces left an imprint upon her pages; but in substance the latter do not differ from the initial plan. The first three "days" of the brief "retreat" indicate to the soul the location of our heaven: this Trinity, this Divine Essence in whom Jesus wills that we dwell and operate, since It is our

"paternal home," this Trinity dwells in our soul. We ought not to seek It outside of ourselves: God will communicate Himself to the soul in its very substance, if it "will descend to its interior depths" by means of holy recollection. The four days following mark the outline of this "descent into the depths" where the meeting with God will take place. What draws God is love, but love that immolates itself to the will of the Father and involves the complete stripping of one's personal life in order to let Christ live in us. To love must be joined a living faith, which causes one to possess God in obscurity and really gives God to us in this life. And in order for love to be fully alive, faith must lead us to believe in the immense love that God has for us. The eighth day tells of the realization of the ideal: the divine life invades the soul; it has become the perfect daughter of God; living in contact with God, it becomes holy with His own holiness. In its interior heaven, where God resides, it adores along with the true Adorer, Jesus Christ, and is rewarded with divine favors. Mary, says an epilogue (the ninth day), our model, surrenders herself to God, in order to seek Him in simplicity, in fidelity, in humility; this is the way.

The thought has been developed, but the "retreat" does not end; on the contrary, there appears unexpectedly the formulation of a still higher ideal: Elizabeth formulates for the first time, in divine accents, her vocation as *praise of glory*, and concludes with an invitation which joins this second vocation to the first: "In the heaven of our souls, let us be praise of glory of the Most Holy Trinity!"

### C. *Praise of Glory*

We know that in the summer of 1905 Elizabeth was struck by the expression "praise of glory" with which St. Paul formulates the highest vocation of the Christian soul.<sup>4</sup> She recognized it as the spontaneous tendency of her own soul, and she inwardly adopted the name, calling herself henceforth "praise of glory."

These were the months during which Elizabeth (already men-

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Philippon, *op. cit.*, Chap. IV, No. 1.

aced by the disease which rapidly consumed her and whose destructive activity she bore with consistent heroism) was approaching the state of mystical transformation. The crisis that, during the Lent of 1906, brought her unexpectedly to the brink of death, found her ready for the supreme self-sacrifice. "With eyes aglow and hands clasping her crucifix, she repeated incessantly with ecstatic joy: Oh Love, Love, Love!" "On the evening of Palm Sunday," she wrote a few days later, "I suffered a great crisis and thought that the hour had at last arrived for me to fly to the infinite regions to contemplate face to face the Holy Trinity Who has already become my abode here on earth. . . . I spent days that defy description anticipating the great vision!"

But it pleased the Lord to leave this heavenly creature on earth for several months longer, in order to console her sisters and edify and instruct so many souls. Elizabeth, after this crisis, lived a truly *heavenly life*. The prospect of going to heaven to see, in the fullness of charity, this Trinity whom she had always sought by faith now occupied all her attention, and she felt the need of speaking of it to all those dear to her. Her thoughts turned spontaneously to the activity of the blessed before the throne of God, and she delighted in the most beautiful pages of the Apocalypse which describe these "visions of eternity." She was no longer concerned with anything except to prepare herself for the office she would perform in heaven, where she would be, in the most perfect manner, praise of glory of the Trinity. In order to prepare herself, she begged permission to make a last retreat; it was granted her, with the invitation to write down her "good thoughts," and being a beautifully obedient Carmelite, she complied with the wishes of her Mother Prioress.

Such was the origin of the *Last Retreat of Praise of Glory*, Elizabeth's masterpiece. "Praise of glory is entering the novitiate of heaven," she wrote to a sister. "I want to learn conformity, identification with my adored Master, the One crucified for love; then I shall be able to fulfill my office of praise of glory." She told the Mother Prioress that in her notes she had sought to express the manner in which she understood her office of praise of glory, or the possibility of living even here on earth the life of heaven.



Without following any systematic order, the *Last Retreat* nevertheless presents a beautiful line of development, which we shall outline briefly in order to facilitate an understanding of this mystical masterpiece.

The central thought and dominant preoccupation is clearly to explain the office of praise of glory to be fulfilled here on earth, as compared with the office of the blessed in heaven; but the explanation of the *exercise* of this office (seventh and eighth days) is preceded by a statement of the *preliminary conditions* which this requires (second to sixth days) and is followed by an indication of the *plan of perfection* which the soul must adopt in order to carry out this exercise (ninth to eleventh days) and of the *guides* whom it must follow in order to arrive at this (twelfth to fifteenth days). It concludes with a magnificent résumé of the fundamental attitude of praise of glory (sixteenth day).

The first day, by way of introduction, sets forth the scope to be covered: to learn here below the office that we shall fulfill in eternity. For this purpose it is necessary to be assimilated to Christ, and since no one has ever known Christ as His Mother knew Him, we must ask Mary to come and instruct the soul.

As a series of stanzas follow one another in a piece of music, the *required conditions* for the soul who wishes to be perfect praise of glory succeed one another: each one seems to lead into the next. The first is interior silence, which brings about unity in the faculties of the soul and does not distract them from the holy recollection in which they maintain contact with God (second day). The positive aspect of this silence is, then, the simple contemplation by which the soul permits God to be reflected in itself and becomes, as it were, an extension of His glory (third day). Moreover, in order to receive this divine illumination, it is necessary to extinguish every other light that is not the light of faith — the *holy darkness*, by means of which the intellect is united with God (fourth day), while the continuous immolation which the soul learns in the school of Christ crucified permits it to avoid the “personal demands” of self-love which would cause it to emerge from the silence of the faculties (fifth and sixth days). And thus the soul is now ready for the exercise of the life of eternal praise.

There follows a magnificent diptych which describes *the life of uninterrupted praise* which can be realized here below.

The first section is a delicate commentary on Psalm 19: "The heavens announce the glory of God," as should also the heaven of the soul. All the communications, the illuminations received from God ought to extol His glory by finding full and faithful correspondence in the soul; but also pains, trials, sufferings patiently accepted and united to those of the Incarnate Word will glorify God with a canticle of love.

In the second section is set forth the example of the blessed in heaven, who prostrate, adore, cast their crowns before the throne of God. So the soul prostrates by immersing itself in its own nothingness and thus becoming capable of adoring with the silent "ecstatic" adoration of a heart enamored of God and emptied of all created things. Having nothing but contempt for itself, it casts away its crown, but receives, as a reward for its humility, the abundance of the divine waters.

But to arrive at these heights it is necessary to *keep aloft the ideal*: to will to be saints as sons of God, holy as God is holy. This is the perfection of which Elizabeth became enamored during her spiritual exercises of October, 1905. This retreat (as described by Mother Germaine, who wrote the *Reminiscences*) was the culmination of all the others: "God," said Elizabeth, "gives me such great light on my vocation, shows me that it is so high and so sublime, that I beg Him not to let me live any longer. Vile as I am, it seems to me very difficult to reach these heights and to maintain myself in them." The ninth, tenth, and eleventh days of the *Last Retreat* explain to us this vocation in all its sublimity: it is truly a matter of total sanctity, which is arrived at through total self-denial and which is crowned with the mystical outpourings of divine transformation.

*Two guides* show us the way: the Incarnate Word and His most holy Mother. From Christ we receive everything, and first of all supernatural life, the fullness of which establishes us in peace, in holy recollection before God, to such an extent that the Trinity "takes up Its abode and is reflected in the soul" (twelfth day). But this peace comes to us through assimilation to Christ; we must

therefore live not only "in Him" (thirteenth day), but also "like Him" (fourteenth day), taking Him as our Model. Jesus is the perfect praise of glory of the Father, but after Him Mary is the "great" praise, and by contemplating her in her life the soul is spurred on (fifteenth day).

The last day (the sixteenth) gathers together the substantial fruit of all these teachings; it is an inspired page, a faithful portrait of Elizabeth's soul in these final weeks of her life: "she lives in the bosom of the tranquil Trinity, in the interior depths of her soul, in the impregnable fortress of holy recollection"; but this completely detached life places her in intimate contact with the unfathomable mystery, the divine infinity: *Immensus Pater, immensus Filius, immensus Spiritus Sanctus*. And here we see this immense Trinity reflected in the soul "who will live in the image of the unchangeable Trinity in an eternal present, adoring It always for Its own sake, and becoming, with a gaze that is increasingly more simple and unitive, *the splendor of His glory*."

#### D. Consuming Love

Each week Elizabeth felt developing within herself this mystical divine communication which "savors of eternal life."<sup>5</sup> On Ascension Day, in the morning, she felt in the depths of her soul those words of Scripture: "If any one love me . . . my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him" (Jn. 14:23), "and at the same time," Elizabeth relates, "I saw how true that is. I cannot say how the three divine Persons revealed Themselves; but I saw Them within me holding Their council of love, and it seems to me that I still see Them thus. Oh how great God is and how much He loves us!" From this day on Elizabeth was to call the Trinity her "omnipotent council." "I feel so strongly that They are here," she had said to her Mother Prioress, clasping her hands to her heart.

This manifestation of the Trinity continued during the final weeks of her life, but took on more and more the appearance of a union of love. In the midst of her excruciating sufferings, she wrote to the Mother Prioress: "I feel my Three so close to me that I am over-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love*, strophe 2.



whelmed more by happiness than by suffering." "I feel Love near me, like a living Being Who says to me: I want to live with you." "There is a Being, Who is Love, Who wishes us to live with Him." One day this Love invaded her more than ever before: "Suddenly I felt myself invaded, as it were, by Love. No expression could describe what I experienced; it was like a fire of infinite beauty and at the same time it seemed to wound me mortally." This was evidently one of those "wounds of love" which St. John of the Cross, in his *Living Flame*, attributes to the Holy Spirit, calling it "a sweet burning" (strophe 2). Did Elizabeth experience the transformation in the Holy Spirit of which St. John of the Cross speaks in strophe 39 of the *Spiritual Canticle*? She does not say so expressly, but everything would lead us to believe so; this is especially true of what she says in the most sublime pages of the retreat written for her sister. In the sixth day, commenting on the words "God is a consuming fire," she explains how mystical souls "think much less of the work of destruction and detachment that they still have to accomplish than of immersing themselves in the furnace of love which burns within them, and which is none other than the Holy Spirit, this same Love which, in the Trinity, is the bond between the Father and His Word. They enter into Him by means of faith and there, simple and tranquil, they are transported by Him above all creatures and sensible delights into the 'sacred darkness' and transformed into the divine image. They live 'in company' with the three adorable Persons, as Saint John says; *their life is one*: this is the contemplative life!"

Elizabeth was doubtless speaking from her own experience, and this seems to be a faithful echo of that described by the mystical Doctor: "the soul will participate in God Himself and this will come about by its doing in Him and together with Him the works of the Blessed Trinity . . . because of the substantial union between the soul and God" (*Spiritual Canticle*, strophe 39, no. 3).

Within Elizabeth there take place the most intimate communications between the Trinity and the enamored soul: she knows the highest summits of this life of union and directs souls magnificently toward them. Elizabeth of the Trinity is truly the "Saint of the divine indwelling."

## BOOK REVIEWS

THE ETERNAL WOMAN, by Gertrud von le Fort,  
The Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee, 110 pp., \$3.50

No one needs to tell us that women are important. Their role as parents, wives, wage earners, and wage spenders is endlessly analyzed in books and magazines. Yet we rarely find a study of women as a part of God's eternal scheme.

It is the ultimate nature of woman—her image in God—that Baroness von le Fort, a trained philosopher and poet, has taken as her subject. The book's metaphysical content necessitates extensive use of symbolism and occasional intricate reasoning, but the reader's extra effort is more than rewarded.

The Blessed Virgin, "though she is immeasurably more than a symbol of womanhood," has given us the key to understanding its mystery. Her words "Be it done unto me," express the co-operation of the creature in the Redemption. The surrender and self-effacement of her "Fiat" is the truly feminine motif.

The three essays which make up the book deal with woman as virgin, bride, and mother. The first is particularly good. The author decries the modern tendency to consider the single life as tragic. In earlier societies, the virgin held a position of honor, for she represents the inherent value of the individual as distinct from any achievement. In the Christian society, she symbolizes the complete surrender of the individual to God.

Although the topic is timeless, many of the conclusions strike directly at the problems of the contemporary woman. Describing the feminist movement as women's attempt to share social responsibility, Baroness von le Fort says it was a failure because "instead of renewing the foundations of social life, it strove to reinforce the outer walls of the edifice."

It is carefully pointed out that women have no special claim to certain virtues or religious qualities. "Here on earth the revelation of all being is twofold," the introduction notes. St. Vincent de Paul sheltering an abandoned child showed maternal compassion. The so-called virile virtues were necessary to the work of Catherine of Siena and Joan of Arc.

*The Eternal Woman* will inspire any woman, but its underlying message of surrender to God is valid for all. Through its pages are scattered innumerable gems worthy of meditation. It would be a shame to miss such treasures.

Catherine Jensen, Washington, D. C.

### CHALLENGE TO ACTION, by Monsignor Joseph Cardijn, Fides, Chicago, Ill., 1955, \$2.50

Monsignor Joseph Cardijn is one of the great Catholic heroes of our day. In a truly extraordinary manner, he has devoted his entire priestly life to an unflagging quest for Christian social justice. The dignity and the worth of the working person have been his prime concern, and that concern has resulted in the formation of the international Catholic movement for working people known as the Young Christian Workers. This book is a collection of Monsignor Cardijn's major addresses, and since it is the first such to be published in English, it has a very special significance.

In the very first address, Monsignor Cardijn outlines the immense and staggering changes that have taken place recently, making our world of today truly a new world. This new world presents several problems which must be met by vigorous Christian action which should bring about a Christian evolution. As Monsignor says:

"The present evolution needs:

"Christians who intensively live their Christianity, their belonging to Jesus Christ; who consciously live His message, His Gospel, in all their personal life, in all its personal demands. . . .

"Christians who are conscious of an explicit mission, who know that they are called to work for the extension of the reign of God. . . .

"Christians who penetrate all the sectors, all the aspects, all the institutions of the modern world, as witnesses of Christ, carrying the doctrine of the Church with them. . . .

"Christians who understand the whole importance of forming apostolic communities, of having an organized apostolate. . . ."

The entire book is eloquently dedicated to enunciating a clear plan of action to counteract the dehumanization and the downgrading of human values which mass industrialization has brought about. Consequently Monsignor urges the young workers to be conscious of their mission and to group themselves together into an organized apostolate.

Much space is dedicated to a consideration of the formation of these



apostles. It is not something to be imposed from above, but something which must grow from within, nourished by the conviction that each worker has a God-given mission to fulfill. In accomplishing this formation, Monsignor Cardijn emphasizes the need for vital and robust religious convictions, convictions that flow from a deep, personal communion with God through prayer and contemplation.

In a world where the dehumanization and the depersonalization of individuals is so common that it's taken for granted, it is heartening indeed to read these stirring words and to see shining through them the glorious vision of man created in the image of God.

Father Patrick McNamara, O.S.M., Portland, Ore.

CHRISTIAN MATURITY, by John Donohue, S.J.,

P. J. Kenedy & Sons, New York, 1955, 214 pp., \$3.50

Father Donohue's purpose in writing *Christian Maturity* is to demonstrate that an outlook on life which is grounded upon objective religious convictions will develop and sustain a mature, well-integrated personality. Psychologists admit that religious beliefs and attitudes greatly affect human personality and behavior, but too many of them understand religion only insofar as it has a therapeutic value. Father Donohue does not deny the subjective value of Christianity. As a matter of fact, he makes large use of this subjective aspect of religion and its role in character development, suggesting the goals Christianity points out to men and the means to attain them. But he also strongly affirms that the maturing of man's greatest potentialities will be effected only when he accepts the objective reality of Christian dogmas, for only in the light of objective truth will existence become intelligible and well ordered.

The author, then, does not present a defense of our faith, nor a method of doctrine, nor meditations. To borrow his own phrase, he desires "to shoulder in" on an already flourishing discussion: the power of Christian religious beliefs to develop the total person.

In the treatment of his subject, the author keeps in mind two possible types of readers. He invites the well-intentioned Christians to reflect with him the truths of their common heritage in the hope that fruitful reflection will provoke a resolution of drawing nearer to Christ. At the same time, he hopes to share his thoughts with non-Christians, because, since life situations are for the most part similar, in a presentation of

the Catholic view of life and its problems, these readers may find our Christian observations useful.

The book consists of a series of thirteen essays grouped in four parts. In the first essay he reviews the complexity of human, national, and global problems, and establishes a need for spiritual maturity in order to face these problems. Always the perfect solution is personal effort and a ready use of God's grace.

Having established the need for a Christian's coming of age in order to face these complexities, the author then leads the reader from considerations of God's existence to the twofold nature of Christ, and to the extension of Christ in His Church. When one discovers, or reaffirms with a clarity born of grace, the reality of God, or admits the divine institution of the Church, he will soon perceive the point of his own life. His growing attachment to Christ and his discovery of the Mystical Body will aid him to see his fraternal relation with others.

Advancing from this point, Father Donohue points out that man's natural distaste for mediocrity and his natural nobility of spirit can lead him, through grace, to great fidelity in responding wholly and consistently to all the implications bound up in the great truths related to God, Jesus, and the Church. Prayer, mortification, and sanctification of the moment are some of the means suggested to attain this maturity of soul. Finally in proportion to the attainment of this spiritual equilibrium, pain, sin, and death become servants of the Christian rather than his masters.

In a world so conscious of neuroses and psychoses, the word "immaturity" falls glibly from our lips, and is apt to become a stock diagnosis for psychical and spiritual ills. Actually the terms "Christian maturity" and "Christian personality" are synonymous with sanctity. For when is personality most Christian but when it approaches the flawless and perfectly blended personality of the human Christ? Or when is a Christian most mature if it be not when he comes of age spiritually? And who dares say when he has arrived? The maturing of personality used in this sense might be accomplished quickly by the workings of grace, will, and nature as in the case of St. Therese, and rather aptly phrased by her religious father, St. John of the Cross:

"The generous heart upon its quest  
Will never falter, nor go slow  
But pushes on, and scorns to rest,  
Wherever it's most hard to go.

It runs ahead and wearies not  
But upward hurls its fierce advance  
For it enjoys I know not what  
That is achieved by lucky chance."

But whether our arrival at spiritual maturity comes early or late, the same instruments bring it about — grace and will. The Christian striving for the state of maturity will continue to work out his salvation as the Apostle counsels in fear and trembling. Father Donohue's discussion of the process provides convincing argument that the religious and laymen ought to be getting there.

Sister M. Fanchon, C.S.J., Milton, Mass.

**FAITH, REASON, AND MODERN PSYCHIATRY**, edited by  
Francis J. Braceland, M.D.,

P. J. Kenedy & Sons, New York, 310 pp., \$6.00

A generation ago psychoanalysis was generally regarded as a mere technique of psychiatric therapy. But today, its significance as a philosophy is recognized, and students of Western culture try to evaluate its influence on medicine, anthropology, and psychology as well as to point out its threat to our traditional religious beliefs.

*Faith, Reason and Modern Psychiatry* carefully analyzes the major themes of the vast intellectual upheaval that has resulted from Freudian and other psychoanalytic thought about the nature of man and of human life. In this important book, edited by Dr. Francis J. Braceland, the reader is offered a series of pointed essays by noted Catholic thinkers whose reflections and observations competently measure the extent of the revolution achieved by the exponents of psychological medicine. Differing markedly in its tone from the other surveys and studies of the same field, the book attempts to establish the basis of agreement between legitimate scientific speculation and divinely revealed truth.

Psychoanalysis has, of course, a significant contribution to make to our understanding of human behavior and in the readjustment of an alarmingly large proportion of people. Nevertheless, in its dealings with the specifically human and intimately personal problems of man, especially those which concern his moral responsibility and his destiny, the limits of this noble science must, as the authors show, be carefully and cautiously defined. It is this rapprochement between psychiatry and religion to which the authors of this symposium have directed them-



selves. Their pointed, significant, and valuable comments do much to provide an enriched and enlightened concept of man. The observations which they offer flow from extensive experience in the clinic, the ward, and in the laboratory as well as from a philosophic and properly humanist view of life. As they discuss the status of psychiatric theory and practice and its claim to the interest and confidence of the public, they provide a sound introduction to a complex and intriguing field of current thought, they help to remove many serious misconceptions of tangled but fascinating issues that have grown out of the modern preoccupation with the science of the mind, and they offer many insights into the theology of mental suffering.

Rudolph Allers, in an opening essay, shows how it is impossible for nontheological science to cope with the profound aspirations of the human soul for fulfillment in the Divine. Dr. Juan Ibor then comments on the existentialist movement with its emphasis on negativism, revolt, and the expropriation from life of the "personal"; while Gregory Zilboorg analyzes the moral and religious implication of the psychoanalytic approach to the human mind. In an exceedingly clear examination of the dangers in clinical "transference," Karl Stern contrasts "angelism" and "psychologism" and points out the weaknesses of unbalanced religious or psychological solutions to problems concerned with the "whole man." Once the writers have established basic principles on the meaningfulness of human experience, they next discuss the metaphysical and theological principles that must govern a truly human understanding of life, of man's spiritual nature and aspirations, and of a more intimate communion with God.

The net effect is to show that theology and psychology are mutually complementary rather than diametrically opposed or contradictory. And while it may be true that this book, like most anthologies, will fail to produce the sharply defined impression that only single authorship can achieve, still Dr. Braceland's careful editorial planning and his short introductions to the various articles give the work sufficient unity, proportion, and completeness to outweigh one's usual objections to such an arrangement. Individually, the separate essays invite respectful reader attention; and collectively they provide, as they had promised, *aperçus* of an engrossing and highly controversial field of current thought.

A critical assessment of the work would, of course, require considerable knowledge of theology and the mental sciences. Nevertheless, the book should be of interest to readers with much less equipment.

Thomas Coffey, New York, N. Y.

**RICHARD RAYNAL, SOLITARY**, by Robert Hugh Benson, with an introduction by Evelyn Waugh, illustrated by Valenti Angelo (a Thomas More Book to Live), Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 162 + xviii pp., \$3.50

Republication of Monsignor Hugh Benson's books, as well as our rereading of them, is developing today an emerging clarification of Hugh Benson as a man of letters. We can, at our vantage point in time, realize his writing was not powered with the same range as the spiritual and intellectual stride that took him into the Church and into Holy Orders. His natural bent was toward letters. This is evident in *Richard Raynal, Solitary*, a novel written in the first year of Benson's Catholic priesthood, and perhaps the least known of all his works.

Richard Raynal is a character Benson dreamed up, a fictional English solitary of the fourteenth century, depicted as living an eremitical routine similar to what is known of the early life of Simon Stock. Benson, however, has his Richard Raynal take a path of martyrdom, upon delivering a prophecy to the saintly King Henry VI. Although this is made the occasion for some quite dramatic and emotional pages devoted to Raynal's contemplative prayer, there are few readers, I believe, who would take these pages any more seriously than the holy little story as a whole, though present-day interest in mystical phenomena will no doubt tend to widen the reader appeal.

The Thomas More Books to Live Series is to be congratulated on its discriminating list, and this, the latest addition to it. The handsome, modern format of the book and the unusual tale combine to provide an interesting reading hour or two for almost anyone, young or old. Evelyn Waugh's preface amounts to an essay, an appreciation of Robert Hugh Benson that manages also to be a discerning profile.

Mary Kiely, Prov., R. I.

**ELIZABETH OF DIJON**, by Hans Urs von Balthasar, Pantheon, New York, 126 pp., \$2.75

Having read and reviewed von Balthasar's self-styled theological explanation of the doctrine and mission of St. Therese of Lisieux, in which he presented some rather bizarre ideas of her approach to God, I took up, with great misgiving, his *Elizabeth of Dijon*. However, in this book, the author appears to have followed the admonition of Pope Pius XII by omitting his existentialist terminology. He, likewise, has avoided the presentation of any conclusions relative to spiritual theology, a field in which



he manifested considerable ignorance in his work on St. Therese. The result is a truly theological exposé of Sister Elizabeth's writings.

The book has five chapters entitled: "Predestination," "Infinity," "Adoration," "Praise," and "Service." The author, in each of these chapters, takes quotations from Sister Elizabeth's writings and arranges them to show her correct theological understanding of each of these subjects. In doing this, i.e., using many quotations from Elizabeth's writings, he again, as he did in his book on St. Therese, neglects to cite the source of these quotations. This is a most serious defect, giving the critical reader no chance to actually compare notes with the originals, nor to ascertain any development in her thought, since the chronological order of the quotations cannot be surely established.

In the preface, the author writes: "We hope the reader will forgive a certain dryness inseparable from this treatment which deliberately foregoes both the interest of anecdote and the warmth of enthusiasm. Since our subject is, strictly speaking, a doctrinal one, a mission of instruction, it requires a detached, objective approach."

The author has evaluated his own book rather well. It is a book which, while giving an objective presentation, is extremely dry reading.

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